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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Fifty-second session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 552nd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 1 October 2001, at 10 a.m.

Temporary Chairman: Mr. KHORRAM (Islamic Republic of Iran)

Chairman: Mr. MOLANDER (Sweden)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION (item 1 of the provisional agenda)

1. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN declared open the fifty-second session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF THE VICTIMS OF THE TERRORIST ACTS OF 11 SEPTEMBER 2001 IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

2. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN, on behalf of all the members of the Executive Committee, expressed sympathy to the Government of the United States of America in connection with the recent terrorist attacks. Members of the Executive Committee were requested to observe a minute's silence.

STATEMENT BY THE OUTGOING CHAIRMAN

3. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN, speaking in his capacity as Chairman of the fifty-first session, said that he had enjoyed excellent cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) throughout his tenure. With the arrival of a new management team at UNHCR, the past year had been a time of change and transition. His first priority had been to encourage and enhance dialogue between host developing countries and cash donor countries. In their own way, however, host countries were themselves donors. In any event, it was important to ensure that they were not left to cope with refugee influxes on their own; they needed to be reassured that they formed part of a broad strategy supported by the international community. As Chairman of the Executive Committee, he had proposed the need for just such a global strategy to address the root causes of situations of mass influx, and to that end he had authorized meetings at various levels between host and donor countries. His second priority had been to improve staff security. Fortunately, no further tragedies involving UNHCR staff had occurred, but continued vigilance was essential.

4. The past year had also witnessed some very positive achievements, for example action on a UNHCR Pledging Conference and commemoration of a World Refugee Day. Work on international protection was proceeding and greater attention had been paid to programme and funding issues. He had used his position to insist on the need for a more equitable geographical distribution of UNHCR staff and had consistently advocated international solidarity and burden-sharing. Finally, he had made extremely valuable field visits to refugee camps in Thailand and the Caucasus.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS (item 2 of the provisional agenda)

5. Mr. BERGH JOHANSEN (Norway) nominated Mr. Molander (Sweden) for the office of Chairman.

6. Ms. de HOZ (Argentina) and Mr. KHATIB (United Republic of Tanzania) seconded the nomination.

7. Mr. Molander (Sweden) was elected Chairman by acclamation.

8. Mr. AYEWOH (Nigeria) nominated Mr. Yimer (Ethiopia) for the office of Vice-Chairman.

9. Mr. NOIRFALISSE (Belgium) and Mr. RAMEL (Philippines) seconded the nomination.

10. Mr. Yimer (Ethiopia) was elected Vice-Chairman by acclamation.

11. Mr. SHEN Yongxiang (China) nominated Mr. Kishimori (Japan) for the office of Rapporteur.

12. Mr. MOCTEZUMA-BARRAGÁN (Mexico) seconded the nomination.

13. Mr. Kishimori (Japan) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

14. Mr. Molander (Sweden) took the Chair.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

15. The CHAIRMAN said that he regarded his election as a recognition of Sweden's role in international refugee protection as a generous asylum country and a major donor to UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations. He would endeavour to continue his predecessor's efforts to enhance dialogue between States and ensure staff security, and he looked forward to working with the new High Commissioner, Mr. Ruud Lubbers. He intended to travel to one or several of UNHCR's field operations to see humanitarian work and the situation of refugees at first hand. It was essential to remember that the Executive Committee's discussions should be anchored in day-to-day experiences in the field.

16. The circumstances which forced refugees to flee in the first place, and the situation they found themselves in after their flight, were the central problems of mass influxes. Efforts should be made to restore refugees' dignity and encourage them to contribute to development, both in their countries of asylum and after they returned home. Refugee women had a special role in that context. They constituted an under-utilized resource that could be better employed.

17. The level of commitment among donors to fund the 2002 UNHCR Annual Programme Budget would become apparent in the course of the current session. In the meantime, it was clear that mechanisms for funding and burden-sharing needed to be refined. The Standing Committee had asked for further discussions on that issue, and informal consultations would be organized accordingly. In addition, non-cash contributors to UNHCR should be given greater visibility and acknowledgement. A process of Global Consultations on international protection had been initiated. At the Ministerial Meeting scheduled for December 2001, States parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol would have an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of those instruments in the global protection regime and

their continued commitment to the principles and provisions enshrined therein. In the so-called "third track", the Executive Committee had mapped out an approach to a format discussing protection needs in the context of new challenges not foreseen by the 1951 Convention. It was to be hoped that the Global Consultations would identify challenges and indicate follow-up action leading to reinforcement of the international refugee protection regime.

18. The international community had rightly condemned the recent terrorist attacks in the United States of America. But shock and outrage should not become a pretext for undermining the right to seek or obtain asylum or a pretext for animosity against asylum-seekers, refugees or foreigners in general. Nor should those heinous crimes obscure the fact that refugees were entitled to a solution to their problems.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (item 3 of the provisional agenda) (A/AC.96/LII/L.1)

19. The agenda was adopted.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4)

Opening statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

20. Mr. LUBBERS (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), addressing his first plenary session of the Executive Committee, said that he had been very impressed by the high calibre and dedication of the Office's staff and paid tribute, in particular, to his predecessor, Ms. Sadako Ogata.

21. Recalling the foremost challenge for UNHCR identified by Ms. Ogata at the 2000 Executive Committee session, namely, the need to strengthen the emergency preparedness and response capacity of UNHCR, he reviewed recent efforts by the Office in facing new emergencies, including crises in Guinea, where it had helped ensure safe access to and safe passage for refugees, and in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where more than 100,000 people had fled their homes. Over the first eight months of 2001, UNHCR had provided emergency support to 22 countries.

22. The barbaric terrorist attacks on the United States of America on 11 September and the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and surrounding countries were a sobering reminder that emergencies were hard to predict. With a view to enhancing its emergency preparedness and response capacity, UNHCR had taken steps to improve staff training and increase the number of deployable emergency core staff, formed new standby arrangements with Governments and partners and built up its emergency stockpile. With regard to the current humanitarian emergency in and around Afghanistan, where a massive relief operation was needed, he hoped that donors would respond positively to the UNHCR appeal for US$ 268 million to cover the following six months, in order to prepare for an influx of up to 1.5 million refugees into neighbouring countries, in particular Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The current unprecedented global effort to combat terrorism should be matched by a comparable effort on the humanitarian front.

23. Turning to another serious challenge for UNCHR, staff security, he recalled the brutal murders of UNHCR colleagues in West Timor, Guinea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and those of members of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). As a tribute to slain colleagues, a permanent memorial would be inaugurated in December 2001 before the UNHCR headquarters building, which would serve as a constant reminder that the organization could not protect refugees if it was unable to ensure the safety of its own staff.

24. Enhancing staff security would remain one of his major priorities. While the mission of UNHCR staff members could never be without risks, there were limits as to what they could accept and proper training and the provision of essential technical equipment were basic minimum conditions for operating at remote duty stations. While some measures had been taken over the past year to enhance the security of staff, major problems remained. In particular, he had strongly protested to the authorities in Indonesia about the unacceptably light sentences given to those responsible for the murder of the UNHCR staff in West Timor and he had called for steps to ensure that there was no impunity for those who attacked humanitarian staff. To achieve improved security, additional funding was undoubtedly needed.

25. Another major challenge for UNHCR related to the management of complex population flows, including mixed flows of refugees, asylum-seekers and other migrants, and mixed-motive migration, where people left their homes for a combination of political, economic and other reasons. With the closure of regular arrival routes, refugees were increasingly turning to smugglers and traffickers or portraying themselves as refugees to overcome immigration barriers. As a result, refugees were often stigmatized in the public mind. He appealed to Governments to find ways of handling asylum applications more quickly and fairly and to politicians and people in receiving countries to avoid stereotyping all asylum-seekers as bogus, if not criminal.

26. The problem of refugees had to be addressed not only by offering protection but also through durable solutions, such as voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement. Failure to provide such solutions led to the degradation of refugees, a rise in crime and the threat of further conflict and instability, with more refugees languishing in refugee camps, taking desperate measures to find safety and a better future and being exploited by criminal networks.

27. For the sustainable local integration of refugees and reintegration of returnees, the gap between emergency relief and longer term development must be closed. It was regrettable that most development assistance excluded refugees. In Africa, for instance, which was home to more than 5.3 million persons of concern to UNHCR, sustainable development would be very difficult to achieve if the productive capacities of refugees were ignored. A similar challenge was faced in other parts of the world as well, such as the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, where several hundred thousand refugees might never return home. Their future would now depend on reconstruction and development activities in Serbia, not on humanitarian aid.

28. Appealing for a more enlightened and integrated view of refugees, he pointed out that they were not simply the beneficiaries of human aid, but also potential contributors to development. The relationship of refugees to development should therefore be rethought, not at conferences in remote venues, but in the field, with the involvement of donors and partners. To

that end, he repeated his call to donors to earmark a modest share of development assistance funding for the interrelated issues of refugees, internally displaced people and affected local populations.

29. Another challenge arose from xenophobia and intolerance, against which UNHCR had launched its "Imagine Coexistence" initiative in 2000, with pilot projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Rwanda. He warned that xenophobia might increase, as it had in the wake of the recent terrorist attacks, with discriminatory assaults on people of Muslim origin, and might lead to further discrimination against refugees, asylum-seekers and minority groups.

30. Turning to the question of organizational management, he reviewed the measures he had taken over his first nine months in office to sharpen the focus of UNHCR and to strengthen its capacity to meet the challenges of the future. He had created a core top management team, referred to as a "seamless troika", comprising himself, the Deputy High Commissioner and the Assistant High Commissioner. Under the new structure, the Director of the Division of International Protection would continue to report directly to the High Commissioner. All internal resource management issues were channelled through the Deputy High Commissioner, whose role had been significantly strengthened, and all operational management issues through the Assistant High Commissioner. He stressed the need, in strategic planning, for the Office to focus less on inputs and more on performance, systematically evaluating its activities and following up this evaluation with appropriate corrective action. He had also taken steps to revitalize senior management, pointing out that he had thereby not only introduced new talent into the Organization but also improved the gender balance and geographical diversity of its senior management. Among measures he had taken to strengthen internal investigation and oversight mechanisms, he noted in particular the comprehensive reform plan currently being implemented in Kenya, in the light of instances of corruption in the Nairobi office, and expressed his determination to ensure that such abuse was eliminated and that resettlement remained a key protection tool.

31. Recalling the 20 per cent budget freeze imposed on all UNHCR operations across the board when he had taken up his appointment and the view expressed in some quarters that UNHCR was unfocused, he drew attention to the "Actions 1, 2 and 3" exercise, by which the 2001 budget had been reduced by roughly 10 per cent and the number of staff posts by 16 per cent.

32. Action 1, defining UNHCRs core activities and strategic direction, had been completed, but donor reactions had been mixed. Some had urged UNHCR to re-prioritize its activities and even withdraw from certain sectors, while others had been reluctant to abandon specific proposals. A particularly contentious issue had been the Office's role with respect to internally displaced persons, who currently constituted almost a third of the people of concern to UNHCR. It was his view that programmes to assist the internally displaced should be contingent upon additional funding being made available by donors. Accordingly, in September 2001, he had issued new operational guidelines clarifying criteria for UNHCRs involvement in that area. He wanted to stress UNHCRs commitment to internally displaced persons, whose situation was comparable to that of refugees: there was no reason to discriminate between the two groups.

33. Action 2 had entailed a thorough review of UNHCRs operations and internal structure, setting priorities on the basis of Action 1 and aiming at greater austerity and efficiency. The revised needs for 2001 currently stood at US$ 882 million (excluding the Afghanistan emergency operation), and he had proposed a budget of US$ 828 million for 2002. The Office's efforts to boost its efficiency were illustrated by the significant staff cuts it had already made, even though there had been no real change in the number of people of concern to the Office. Furthermore, while most of the savings had been made in the field rather than at headquarters, between 1995 and 2000 there had been a 34 per cent reduction in headquarters expenditure and he was therefore convinced that headquarters was currently close to its optimum size.

34. Under the implementation phase of Action 2, 11 country offices would be closed and the Office's staff reduced by 16 per cent, or 760 posts. To minimize the negative effects of this painful undertaking, UNHCR had taken a number of steps, with the constructive cooperation of the Staff Council, including early retirement and voluntary separation programmes. In addition, a total of 219 staff had been reassigned under an accelerated postings procedure. In his view, the resulting savings had been sufficient, when seen in the historical context of the ratio between the numbers of people of concern to UNHCR and its budget. The current working budget was less than US$ 40 per year for each person of concern, which was considerably lower than in previous years. In his view, the current budget was an absolute minimum and already insufficient to meet certain important needs.

35. Action 3 - fund-raising - was an ongoing process. While he appreciated the efforts of countries hosting refugee populations and of countries of resettlement, there was a need for adequate cash contributions. Donors should consider a minimum level of contributions to UNHCR, commensurate with its global mandate. An amount of US$ 1 or €1 per citizen was an objective that richer countries that did not do so already could attain. The Office was seeking to diversify its support base by upgrading its private sector fund-raising efforts, appointing a special representative to the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, and promoting dialogue with the European Union.

36. While UNHCR might, in some cases, improve its performance with the same level of funding, in other cases it could do so only with additional resources. A way must be found to avoid the chronic budget shortfalls of late; such shortfalls impacted negatively on both quality and performance and further weakened the Office's ability to mobilize resources. He urged donors that had pledged funds for the last quarter of 2001 to make their contributions in a timely manner - some US$ 100 million was outstanding, and even then there would still be a shortfall of some US$ 50 million. Contributions for the Afghan emergency operation were, of course, welcome, but should not be at the expense of other programmes. Commitments received to date for 2002 provided only partial reassurance that the proposed programme budget would be fully funded. He hoped that donors would not reduce their level of funding but that, on the contrary, they would increase their contributions so that UNHCR would become a truly multilateral organization, sharing the burden among member States.

37. Recent crises had illustrated the severity of the refugee problem and the need for UNHCR to adapt to a changing international political environment. There were many threats: restrictive interpretation of the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the deteriorating quality of asylum, the burden of hosting refugees and the perceived

abuse of asylum. Against that backdrop, the Global Consultations on International Protection had been launched to promote the effective implementation of the 1951 Convention and develop new approaches to ensure international protection and durable solutions. In that connection, the States parties to the 1951 Convention would meet in December 2001 with a view to adopting a declaration. The Global Consultations provided an opportunity for dialogue, and would help to shape an agenda for protection in the years ahead. Fruitful discussions had already taken place and expected outcomes included new policy approaches and operational guidelines. The result would be a roadmap reflecting shared strategic goals and recommending key actions.

38. The question arose of whether or not UNHCR - as it stood in legal terms, as it was positioned within the United Nations system and as it was currently funded - would be able to meet the challenges ahead. To address that question he had launched the "UNHCR 2004" process, to be concluded by 1 January 2004, when the current mandate was due for renewal.

39. With regard to the fight against international terrorism, the rising tide of xenophobia and intolerance had to be resisted: no people, no region and no religion should be condemned because of the unspeakable acts of a few. Refugees and asylum seekers were vulnerable in the current climate, and Afghans, who constituted the largest refugee population in the world, were particularly vulnerable. A war on terrorism must not become a war on Afghans or on Islam. Each of the solutions for refugee problems - voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement - was attainable only on the basis of respect. Everyone shared in the responsibility of ensuring respect for the individual dignity and worth of every refugee. Politicians and the media had a special responsibility to combat racism, xenophobia and intolerance, and must resist the temptation to make scapegoats of refugees.

Statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

40. Ms. ROBINSON (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that in the shadow of the crimes against humanity perpetrated against civilians in the United States of America, UNHCR again stood at the centre of world affairs. The atrocities would have profound implications for the United Nations, with the escalating humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and surrounding countries.

41. The work of ensuring protection for vulnerable persons necessitated a wide range of actions and strategies. While the work would vary depending on the mandate of the organization involved, there were no competing understandings of the core nature of protection work, namely the safeguarding of the rights and dignity of the individual. That core nature flowed from the three legal foundations of refugee law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Considerable effort had been devoted to clarifying the implications for protection work of those three bodies of law. Experience had been gained from the work of the Commission on Human Rights and the human rights treaty bodies, as well as the work carried out by human rights field operations and the mainstreaming of human rights throughout the United Nations system. A clearer understanding had been reached of the implications of human rights for the work of protection. Nevertheless her Office needed to learn from the accumulated experience of UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

42. The Secretary-General had drawn attention to the relationship between human rights and fundamental standards of humanity, and UNHCR had provided helpful clarification of the role of human rights and its relationship to refugee law in its Note on international protection. The task of addressing the human rights aspect of the work of protection was a common responsibility, and her Office would make vigorous efforts to be of service in the work of protection in the field. It would focus on three main categories: providing human rights technical advice and assistance for the undertaking of protection activities; assisting initiatives to combat impunity; and assisting advocacy efforts on behalf of victims, inter alia through enhanced human rights monitoring, reporting and analysis. Her Office would also strive to engage more effectively the full range of human rights protection and promotion instruments.

43. Within the framework of the coordinated United Nations response to the crisis in Afghanistan, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had made itself available to be of all possible assistance to its sister agencies, funds and operations. That partnership would be of immediate help in addressing the critical protection needs of the Afghan people.

44. Mr. FOLEY (United States of America) expressed his country's gratitude for the condolences proffered by the Executive Committee in connection with the terrorist acts of 11 September 2001. Those terrible events served to underscore the importance of the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

45. UNHCR had faced change and challenges in 2001: funding shortfalls leading to budgetary and staffing cutbacks, renewed focus on the core mandate of protection, new problems in the Balkans, continued insecurity in west Africa, and now a potential new crisis in the Afghan refugee situation. His Government was confident that countries in the region would open their doors to refugees fleeing Afghanistan, as they had so generously in the past. The United States stood ready, together with others, to provide humanitarian support. The year 2001 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the 1951 Convention, and was a year when all must reaffirm their commitment to the international refugee regime.

46. The High Commissioner needed to address several key issues. Firstly, the prioritization of UNHCRs activities, with an emphasis on the mandate responsibilities of protection and durable solutions and on agreements with other organizations to ensure that all assistance needs were met. In that regard his Government commended the High Commissioner for his Action 1 initiative, refocusing the Office on its core protection mandate. His delegation was, however, concerned that insufficient attention was paid to physical protection, especially of women and children, and urged UNHCR to take immediate measures to increase its protection presence in the field. While repatriation remained the preferred durable solution, he welcomed the reaffirmation of the importance of resettlement as both a durable solution and a protection tool. Secondly, with regard to the call for a global recommitment to the international protection regime, he commended UNHCR on putting together the Global Consultations and welcomed the convening of the December 2001 meeting. He hoped that those efforts would reinforce the commitment to the implementation of the Convention and Protocol, and encourage others to accede to them. Thirdly, emergency response mechanisms must be strengthened Progress by UNHCR in that area was exemplified by its response to the emergency in Macedonia and the impending crisis in south Asia. Such rapid and well-organized deployments of staff and

resources should become the norm whenever UNHCR was called upon. Fourthly, there was a need to move forward quickly on security of both refugees and humanitarian workers. And lastly, food aid constituted a further challenge. The World Food Programme must receive the support it needed to carry out its responsibilities towards refugees.

47. Millions of refugees around the world were in need of care and protection. Neither those refugees nor the countries that so generously hosted them must be forgotten. For its part, his Government would continue to contribute its fair share to the budget of UNHCR. He regretted that the Office had been forced to move to a resource-based budget, and he looked forward to the "sauter" phase of the High Commissioner's plan in 2003. He called on other donors to renew their commitment to the international refugee regime and to provide support for UNHCR's protection and assistance programmes around the world.

48. Mr. NOIRFALISSE (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union and, in addition, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey, welcomed the plan of action introduced by the High Commissioner. He stressed the importance of assuring the safety of humanitarian workers.

49. Despite stabilization in some regions, elsewhere conflict continued to erupt. The European Union was making significant efforts to assist in the critical situation prevailing in Afghanistan.

50. His delegation fully supported the efforts undertaken by the High Commissioner to improve the functioning of the Office, bearing in mind budget constraints, and the situation of refugees. UNHCR was a key actor in the quest for global stability and durable solutions. The actions 1, 2 and 3 initiative was of great interest and should produce the desired results. The evaluation function would remain a priority. The European Union was in consultation with UNHCR with a view to placing its funding on a more stable and predictable basis. The 1951 Convention remained the cornerstone of the regime of international protection, and had inspired other, regional instruments. He noted in that regard that the principle of non-refoulement had long been part of international customary law. The mandate of the Office - international protection, humanitarian assistance to refugees and the quest for durable solutions - remained valid. An objective system of asylum required a series of measures, including, as a last resort, the involuntary return, with due respect for humanitarian concerns, of those who did not need international protection.

51. The European Union welcomed the Global Consultations on International Protection, and would play an active role in the formulation of an agenda for protection. Some elements would fall within the mandate of UNHCR, and others within the purview of States. It was important for the preliminary agenda to be made available to member States well in advance of the December meeting. The European Union sought to bring the priorities of UNHCR and the Union into alignment, and had been working on the formulation of its common asylum and immigration policy since 1999 so as to better meet contemporary challenges. The model adopted by the Union was unique in its comprehensive focus at the same time on political, human rights and development aspects in countries and regions of origin and transit. There must be in-depth consideration of immigration policy that took account of the changing circumstances of a multicultural society. The European Union had a balanced approach to legal migration in its

relations with those countries that were candidates for accession. A conference on legal migration, to be held in October 2001, would focus on the link between asylum and migration. The establishment of a system of asylum would benefit from implementation of a managed system of migration.

52. The European Union had reacted immediately to the terrorist attacks of 11 September in the United States. The European Commission had been mandated to carry out an urgent study on the maintenance of internal security in conformity with the obligations of international protection. The European Union would seek to defend the integrity of the institution of asylum, in accordance with the 1951 Convention, taking into account new threats and challenges. In that regard it reaffirmed its full support for UNHCR.

53. Mr. HARAGUCHI said Japan was pleased to see that the three-pronged internal review seemed to have moved UNHCR onto the right track, although some fine tuning of its efforts might still be required. With regard to Action 1, concerning the definition of core activities, he pointed out that only half of the 22 million people of concern to UNHCR were refugees; the rest were asylum-seekers, returnees, internally displaced persons and others. UNHCR might require some flexibility in order to deal with the shift in priorities. For example, although it was not considered a core activity, it might be appropriate to pay due attention to the reintegration of returned refugees as an incentive to cooperative Governments. Such an approach would be useful in cases such as that of Muslims from Rakhine State in Myanmar, where UNHCR could play a catalytic role in finding a durable solution.

54. He was pleased to note that the initial anxiety among staff and host countries caused by the downsizing activities of Action 2 had subsided, thanks to the High Commissioner's wise leadership. He was convinced that a lean and more efficient structure would enable UNHCR to operate more cost-effectively and further advance its various partnerships. With regard to Action 3, he stressed that, although it was urgent for all donors to address the chronic budget shortfall and underfunding, better coordination among donors was equally important.

55. As to his own Government's contribution to UNHCR's goals, he said Japan's core contribution had accounted for between 10 and 15 per cent of UNHCR's annual budget for the past 10 years. As a result of economic stagnation, however, Japan's entire Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget for 2002 was to be decreased by 10 per cent. He was therefore unable to indicate how much Japan would be contributing to UNHCR in 2002. In addition, Japan's voluntary contributions, including those to UNHCR, would be adversely affected by the depreciation of the Japanese yen against the United States dollar. In the meantime, progress had been made in enhancing UNHCR's predictability and flexibility with the allocation of funds through a single tranche contribution with broader earmarking. Japan also contributed to the Human Security Fund [E/1999/SR.18, §63], which had already provided funds to establish the UNHCR Regional Centre for Emergency Training for NGO and government officials in Asia and the Pacific, and to the "Imagine Coexistence" initiative in Bosnia and Rwanda. The Fund also intended to finance the IDP project in Colombia.

56. Lastly, his Government had been exploring a new pillar of cooperation with UNHCR, aimed at stronger linkage between development funds and their humanitarian impact. As UNHCR's strength was its field presence, Japanese embassies at the operational frontiers had

been instructed to work more closely with UNHCR. A precursor to that was the collaboration between the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and UNHCR in Tanzania, which aimed to alleviate the burden borne by the host country and allow UNHCR to concentrate on refugee protection and assistance. He hoped that such cooperation would support the High Commissioner's vision of empowering refugees to work towards their own solutions and involving them in the development process.

57. In conclusion, he paid tribute to those who were engaged in humanitarian actions in difficult and dangerous conditions and particularly to those who had sacrificed their lives. Humanitarian work would never be without risk and measures must be devised to reduce those risks as much as possible.

58. Mr. BEHZADIAN (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the recent terrorist attacks in the United States had brought the world face-to-face with a grave crisis that would undoubtedly have a political, social and economic impact in his region. His Government condemned the attacks, but believed the serious global campaign against terrorism needed a wise approach to avoid risking the lives of more innocent people and plunging the region into a new crisis of displaced persons.

59. For 20 years, Iran had hosted millions of refugees, migrants and displaced persons and was therefore familiar with the considerable social, economic, cultural, political and security problems that the rest of the world was beginning to witness. As a result of political instability, epidemics, terrorism and natural disasters in Afghanistan, with no sign of any sustainable development plan, large numbers of migrants, displaced persons and refugees had illegally entered Iran. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the United States, Iran had closed its borders, but it was ready to facilitate efforts to meet a further refugee crisis by keeping air, marine and ground corridors open for the transit of humanitarian assistance inside Afghanistan and was already making arrangements to that effect with UNHCR, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The Afghan refugee problem was compounded by the fact that drug traffickers abused the protection afforded to genuine refugees and asylum-seekers. It was essential for UNHCR to discuss a mechanism to prevent that from happening.

60. His Government had a number of points to make that would help in implementing UNHCR's review process. Consideration should be given to a specific mechanism for more serious contributions by the international community; an appropriate mechanism for allocating contributions should be devised, based on the number and requirements of refugees; a distinction should be drawn between refugees and economic migrants; countries' representation in the structure of UNHCR should be commensurate with their role in hosting refugees or their cash contributions to UNHCR; and UNHCR's activities and budget should be optimized so that most of its resources were allocated to the refugee problem and the cost borne by host countries.

61. Although the Iranian Government appreciated the international community's contributions, they did not match the size of its refugee population. International assistance did not meet even one of the basic needs of Iran's refugees for one week. His Government's annual expenditure on refugees exceeded UNHCR's total annual budget. Having hosted the largest refugee population in the world for the longest time, Iran had recently adopted a Comprehensive

Plan for the Identification of Aliens, which represented a completely new approach to dealing with refugees. Some two and a half million refugees, migrants and displaced persons had been identified, 95 per cent of whom lived freely in various parts of the country and around five per cent in refugee camps.

62. Iran firmly believed that the refugee crisis demanded more serious contributions from the international community, particularly its richer members. The international community was jointly responsible for solving the global crisis and it was not fair for host countries to be left alone to cope with the consequences. Voluntary repatriation was the most durable solution and was closely linked with development in the countries of origin, particularly in such areas of infrastructure as health care, job opportunities, education and housing. For Iran, such development in the rural and urban areas close to the Afghan border, combined with serious de-mining efforts, constituted the top priority. Humanitarian and development work went hand in hand. Iran was ready to exchange views with the international community and to offer the benefit of its own experience in finding effective new approaches.

63. Ms. BEDLINGTON (Australia) said that the fiftieth anniversary of the Convention was a time for reflecting on the effectiveness of its implementation through the international protection framework. How well did the individual elements of that framework interact and how well did they work for individual refugees and host countries?

64. The largest, most complex and currently most topical case was the long-standing one of Afghan refugees. How had they fared with regard to key elements of the framework such as access to countries of first asylum, registration and status determination, support for countries of first asylum, sustainable repatriation, local integration and resettlement? First, there had been outstanding generosity from host countries in the region, particularly Iran and Pakistan, who had sheltered millions of prima facie refugees. Secondly, there had been limited access to registration and status determination. Recent screening programmes in Iran and Pakistan were a welcome development. Thirdly, support for countries of first asylum had clearly not met needs. Given the possibility of increases in refugee flows, the international community must demonstrate how it could increase its support. Fourthly, the size of the caseload had decreased only slowly. Problems within Afghanistan such as poor governance, human rights abuses, civil war and drought had meant very limited sustainable repatriation. The international protection framework had thus provided basic protection but not durable solutions, with the result that millions of people were living in uncertainty and poverty in border regions or found themselves at the mercy of people smugglers. The question was why. Were the numbers involved too large for existing approaches to cope with? Were the political dimensions too complex? Had it been assumed that it was a regional problem? Whatever the answers, comprehensive solutions must be found.

65. The recent terrorist attacks in the United States would place new pressures on the international protection framework, not only in terms of additional refugee flows but also in terms of willingness to provide asylum and resettlement. It was important not to let that happen and to work to preserve the commitment to respond. Responses would need to be planned, since the political dimensions had to be carefully managed. With humanitarian operations within Afghanistan severely constrained, the international community must also focus on neighbouring host countries and the creation and maintenance of immediate protection space. Her delegation

hoped that the forum convened by UNHCR and OCHA would lead to the development of a comprehensive, integrated strategy for addressing the problems of displaced Afghans. Australia was willing to provide up to US$ 150,000 to support the forum's activities. Moreover, her Government had recently committed an additional 14 million Australian dollars to the protection and assistance of Afghans in the region.

66. Mr. MOCTEZUMA-BARRAGÁN (Mexico) said that his Government attached great importance to the issue of refugees, and had recently drawn up a new asylum agenda. The first item on that agenda was completion of the process of integrating the Guatemalan refugees who had opted for resettlement and Mexican nationality, combined with the strengthening of Mexico's protection infrastructure, in particular through the establishment of an eligibility committee. The second item was Mexico's contribution to international protection for refugees, which would be based on the principles derived from its own tradition and experience. The first of those principles was that voluntary repatriation and full integration into host countries were the most durable solutions. The second principle was the vital need for prevention, either in the short-term, by strengthening national capacity to deal with refugee situations, or in the medium term, by eliminating the causes of refugee flows through economic and social development in all countries. The third principle was that international cooperation, solidarity and burden-sharing were key instruments in dealing with the refugee situation around the world. The fourth principle was that a human rights approach was needed in order to prevent the discrimination to which so many refugees were subjected.

67. The current global consultations would enable UNHCR and Governments jointly to draw up a world refugee agenda for the twenty-first century, on the basis of the Convention and its Protocol, non-refoulement and the fundamental role of UNHCR. They had also demonstrated the importance of reaching basic agreements on the causes of refugee situations. Of particular concern was the question of mixed flows and the relationship between migrants and refugees, whose characteristics and legal situation were quite distinct.

68. Mr. POPPE (Germany) said that UNHCR faced tremendous challenges, with unabated refugee flows in many parts of the world and the developments in Afghanistan demanding the utmost commitment from UNHCR's staff. At the same time, resources were limited and UNHCR was in the throes of implementing far-reaching but promising reforms.

69. His Government intended to help UNHCR fulfil its tasks. Despite serious budgetary constraints, Germany's basic contribution for the current year was DM 8.5 million - an increase of five per cent - and would be higher in 2002. UNHCR would remain Germany's major international project partner in the field of humanitarian assistance. Germany's expenditure of several billion deutsche mark on hosting refugees, repatriation programmes and crisis-prevention measures was a significant contribution towards avoiding new refugee flows. Germany welcomed and actively participated in the global consultations, which ran parallel to the measures towards harmonizing asylum law within the European Union.

70. With regard to the internal reform process, his delegation particularly welcomed the distinctions being made between core and non-core tasks, which had led to a reduction in the budget deficit. A number of specific issues, in particular the financing mechanisms, would certainly require further discussion, given their complexity, but overall the reforms would strengthen UNHCR's mandate and give it an enhanced political role in the protection of refugees.

71. In the light of recent developments, Germany had a special responsibility as the current chair of the Afghanistan Support Group. At its last meeting, the Support Group had announced a substantial increase in its contributions to Afghan refugees. On the same occasion, the German Minister for Foreign Affairs had announced a further DM 30 million in assistance to the region.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.

UNITED NATIONS **A**

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Fifty-second session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 553rd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 1 October 2001, at 5 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. MOLANDER (Sweden)

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GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

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GE.01-02874 (E) 121001 071101

The meeting was called to order at 5.20 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. MACLEOD (Canada) said his country welcomed the opening statement made by the High Commissioner in his first address to the Executive Committee. As UNHCR celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the current situation in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries confirmed the continuing relevance of the Convention and its Protocol for refugee protection. Canada stood ready to support UNHCR's efforts both to respond to the immediate needs arising from the emerging situation and to contribute to long-term solutions. The situation in Central Asia, however, should not distract from the needs of refugees in other parts of the world.

2. The steps taken by UNHCR to enhance the safety of its staff were very welcome and further efforts must be made in that regard. Canada also welcomed the review process initiated by the High Commissioner within the first few months of beginning his mandate and supported the analysis of core and non-core functions within UNHCR. The strengthening of partnerships, which the High Commissioner had emphasized, remained critical for operational effectiveness. His delegation encouraged the High Commissioner to follow through with the implementation of the proposed actions and sustain the dialogue with Executive Committee members. It was also looking forward to working with him on the UNHCR 2004 process.

3. The international community as a whole must provide adequate support for UNHCR's activities. Most of those activities were currently funded by only 15 donors, and it was therefore essential for UNHCR to make efforts to broaden its financing base.

4. Canada urged UNHCR to implement a results-based management approach that would establish firm links between priority setting and the budget process, and to strengthen internal evaluation capacity, so as to make evaluations a tool for effective management. If the needs of UNHCR's beneficiaries were to be met, it was also essential to mainstream gender equality within all UNHCR programmes.

5. An enhanced emergency-preparedness capability within UNHCR remained an important objective. UNHCR had already built on the lessons learnt from the Kosovo evaluation and Canada commended its work during the past year in Guinea and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Related to that was the need for UNHCR, in partnership with all concerned parties, to continue to pursue creative, holistic approaches to the ongoing challenges of refugee protection, in particular in the camps. Canada strongly supported UNHCR's efforts to include refugee issues in development assistance policies and programmes.

6. The discussions that had taken place during the Global Consultations on International Protection constituted a good beginning, provided they led to concrete results. A draft conclusion had been presented to the Executive Committee, but Canada believed that a more comprehensive approach was required and looked forward to hearing more from UNHCR about the proposed Agenda for Protection.

7. In conclusion, he said Canada reaffirmed its strong support for the work of UNHCR. Given the scale and complexity of the problems arising out of refugee movements, Canada remained committed to the principles of international solidarity and responsibility-sharing. It did not believe it was useful to draw distinctions between "host countries" and "donor countries". Canada, like other countries, played both roles and would continue to work with UNHCR in order to ensure the vitality and integrity of the institutions of international protection.

8. Mr. HEINEMANN (Netherlands) said his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the European Union and gave its full support to the new High Commissioner, Mr. Lubbers, and his team. Following the tragic events of 11 September, the Netherlands stood ready to contribute 70 million guilders (nearly US$ 30 million) to the Inter-Agency Emergency Assistance Plan for central Asia, but it hoped that the crisis in Afghanistan would not divert attention from the enormous problems and need for protection of refugees elsewhere.

9. UNHCR could and should play a pivotal role in implementing the principle of reception in the region, a solution the Netherlands recommended and to which it gave preference through its financial aid. The need to close the gap between emergency aid and longer term development should encourage a rethink of the relationship between refugees and employment: the Netherlands had stressed that point for a number of years and shared the High Commissioner's views in that regard.

10. European countries were currently engaged in harmonizing their asylum and migration policies. The UNHCR office in Brussels played an important role in that debate. However, the Netherlands would welcome a reassessment of the added value of the many UNHCR offices in Europe.

11. The Netherlands was pleased to note that the efforts to rationalize UNHCR's operations had resulted, inter alia, in an improvement in its emergency response capacity. It commended the High Commissioner's visionary leadership and believed it was essential to continue setting priorities in the light of UNHCR's core mandate, which was to provide the protection and assistance refugees needed. Such choices should be reflected in the budget with the allocation of comparatively more funds to neighbouring countries hosting refugees. The Netherlands commended the initiatives to diversify UNHCR's funding base. The Executive Committee currently approved UNHCR's budget without assurances that it would be funded, which made management difficult. In order to help matters, the Netherlands could therefore announce that its 2002 contribution would at least equal its 2001 contribution of around 120 million guilders (nearly US$ 50 million), excluding the special contribution to Afghanistan and the neighbouring region. Starting in fiscal year 2002, the Netherlands would also agree to multi-year financing, which would allow UNHCR more flexibility.

12. Mr. ULLERUP (Denmark) said that the current turmoil in South-West Asia following the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington demonstrated that a concerted international response was absolutely necessary in order to deal with the problems arising from major new flows of refugees. The situation in and around Afghanistan had already been critical, but after the events of 11 September it threatened to develop into a major humanitarian crisis.

13. UNHCR faced a number of important challenges, which it had to resolve if it was to maintain the status it currently enjoyed. Denmark therefore welcomed the High Commissioner's decision to review the basic parameters within which UNHCR would have to operate in the future. Protection was at the heart of UNHCR's activities and at the core of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. His delegation therefore welcomed the High Commissioner's indications that he was ready to reconfirm the importance of that objective and to make it the principal concern of the organization.

14. As part of the reforms he wished to pursue, the High Commissioner had expressed a wish to focus UNHCR's work on the organization's core activities. His delegation agreed with that aim: Denmark, like a number of other donors, had over the years encouraged UNHCR to limit its activities in areas such as rehabilitation and reintegration, which were outside its core mandate. Other organizations were better placed to address such questions. Part of the strategy for such a concentration must be to reach agreements on a better division of labour with UNHCR's key partners. That required UNHCR to make efforts to ensure that other agencies actually did take over in the areas it withdrew from.

15. The proposed budget for 2002 represented the absolute minimum necessary to allow UNHCR to fulfil its important functions and it was essential for it to be fully financed. The financial burden therefore needed to be spread more equitably and UNHCR's efforts to attain that goal deserved recognition. In that regard, Denmark intended to remain one of UNHCR's staunchest supporters. Its total contribution in 2001 had exceeded US$ 37 million and, subject to parliamentary approval, it would be increasing the non-earmarked part of its contribution in the years to come. At the same time, its earmarked contributions for specific regional and country programmes were expected to remain at the current level.

16. His delegation sympathized with the High Commissioner in his efforts to promote the idea of supplementing UNHCR's own resources by making some of the development assistance resources available to refugees, but believed that the issue should be tackled in the context of the overall development plans of the countries in question and not through a patchwork of special contributions from donors.

17. The forthcoming Conference of the States Parties would provide a unique opportunity to broaden accession to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol and to enhance effective implementation of the regime around the world. Lastly, he said Denmark had always supported the global consultation process as a means of improving the dialogue between donor countries and those hosting large numbers of refugees. Consultations were a precondition for improved cooperation and enhanced protection to those in need.

18. Mr. SANGARÉ (Côte d'Ivoire) condemned the acts of terrorism against the United States and all attacks on UNHCR staff on mission in the field.

19. Côte d'Ivoire contributed, within its modest means, to the effective implementation of Action 1, concerning the definition of UNHCR's core activities. With regard to Action 2, while

Côte d'Ivoire shared UNHCR's desire to economize, it was nevertheless concerned that in practice the measures taken might result in inadequate protection for refugees. Action 2 had already led, in September 2001, to the closure of UNHCR sub-offices in Danané and Tabou, where some 90,000 refugees lived. Unless action was taken in the meantime, it would also lead to the closure, in December 2001, of a third local UNHCR office in Guiglo, where more than 30,000 refugees lived. At a time when Côte d'Ivoire was striving for national reconciliation, the measures taken under Action 2 could hinder the country's return to peace and stability. His delegation therefore hoped that the decisions taken by UNHCR would address the concerns both of refugees and of the populations that hosted them.

20. Côte d'Ivoire supported and encouraged UNHCR's efforts under Action 3, concerning the review of financing mechanisms. However, Actions 1, 2 and 3 must take account of developing countries' particular situation and aim to mobilize international solidarity with a view to sharing the financial burden.

21. The search for funding for the education project for refugee children and for rehabilitation of the refugee reception area remained an urgent priority for Côte d'Ivoire and his Government had signed a protocol of agreement with UNHCR, UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) to that effect. His delegation wished to express its thanks publicly to the donors, particularly the United States Government, who had made it possible to launch the project. However, additional funding would be necessary to build and equip 348 classrooms over the next five years. Funding would also be needed to provide vocational training to young refugees who would not be able to attend Ivorian schools. Lastly, his Government appealed for funds for the rehabilitation of the refugee reception area, where the presence of 120,000 refugees had caused serious deterioration.

22. Ms. WHELAN (Ireland) said her delegation associated itself with the statement made by Belgium on behalf of the European Union. During 2001, difficult but essential measures had been taken to address the ongoing shortfalls in UNHCR's budget. Ireland broadly supported the High Commissioner's approach in that regard. The Actions process would need to be carried out in close consultation with the donors and all the actors concerned. In order to help fund the budget, Ireland supported the announcement of core contributions as early as possible following the approval of the unified budget. Ireland's contribution in 2001 represented a 100 per cent increase on the previous year's funding. Its core contribution for 2002 would be US$ 5.5 million, within a multi-year funding framework. It was strongly in favour of results-based budgeting and would like to see an analysis of those results in the mid-year progress report.

23. In terms of regional priorities, it was clear that the focus must be on the evolving situation in Afghanistan. However, it would be a mistake to ignore other emergency situations and reduce the funding available to deal with them.

24. Ireland welcomed the gradual easing of the situation in East Timor, which would make it possible for significant numbers of the refugees still in West Timor to return home. It had also been impressed by UNHCR's commitment to improving the security environment for all its staff. However, it would like to see security costs covered by the United Nations regular budget.

25. The expansion of participation in global consultations on protection of refugees was a testimony to the relevance of the process, and Ireland was committed to working actively on the third track. With regard to the first track, valuable progress had been achieved on the declaration for the Ministerial Meeting to be held in December 2001, at which Ireland would be represented by its Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.

UNITED
NATIONS

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8 October 2001

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Fifty-second session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 554th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 2 October 2001, at 10 a.m.

Chairman:	Mr. MOLANDER	(Sweden)
later:	Mr. YIMER (Vice-Chairman)	(Ethiopia)

CONTENTS

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

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GE.01-02896 (E) 031001 081001

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. FULLER (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), noting the new challenges facing UNHCR, reaffirmed his country's support for the response by the international community to, in particular, the Afghan crisis, for which the United Kingdom had allocated US$ 54 million in additional funding.

2. The United Kingdom welcomed the structural reforms initiated by the High Commissioner, with a view to developing a sharper focus for UNHCR and improving its accountability, transparency and financial management. Another commendable initiative had been the Global Consultations, which would lead to a better understanding of the difficulties of individual States and help revitalize the refugee protection regime. The United Kingdom looked forward to the agenda for protection, as one of the outcomes of the Consultations, and also welcomed the development of stronger partnerships with other agencies, donors, implementing partners and refugees themselves, as essential means of enhancing cooperation and performance and as vehicles for capacity-building.

3. Reaffirming the United Kingdom's commitment to supporting UNHCR, he reminded the meeting that support for UNHCR was not only financial, as in the case of host countries which bore the enormous burden of accommodating large refugee populations, and stressed the need to explore ways in which the international community could better share that burden.

4. Mr. AL AGHBASH (Sudan) conveyed his country's deep regret and condolences to the families of the victims of the terrorist attacks against the United States of America. Reviewing the international legal basis for the protection of refugees, he stressed the need to enhance and invigorate the effect of those legal instruments by linking legal protection with assistance, an essential step in securing the basic human rights of refugees, and to redefine the notion of refugee, in the light of international developments in the post-cold-war era, to exclude cases of economic migration.

5. Recalling his country's experience with the voluntary repatriation of refugees, he appealed for continued assistance from UNHCR and the international community in dealing with the outstanding caseload. Following the application of the cessation clause, Sudan faced an alarming situation, as all assistance programmes to the refugee-affected areas had been suspended during the early 1990s for political reasons, without regard for the humanitarian nature of the problem.

6. In particular, he stressed the need to safeguard the integrity of refugee families and the welfare of refugee children, especially girls. He reiterated Sudan's insistence on the right of refugees to return home, in accordance with article 5 of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and deplored the fact that, for political reasons, Sudanese refugees were being impeded in the exercise of that right. He reaffirmed his country's commitment to all regional and international instruments on refugees and, in particular, to article 5 of the 1969 OAU Convention, and its support for the current preparations to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the 1951 Convention.

7. Mr. KYRÖLÄINEN (Finland) welcomed the High Commissioner's plea for a "culture of respect", particularly in the context of the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, and stressed that the international fight against terrorism should not turn into a war against Afghans or on Islam. While UNHCR most often had to respond to emergencies, he agreed with the High Commissioner's view that closer attention should be given to preventive action and to building capacity in refugee-hosting countries, which required new linkages between humanitarian and development aid. Accordingly, he welcomed efforts to forge closer relationships between UNHCR and development agencies and bilateral donors. Finland welcomed the initiatives by the High Commissioner to revitalize the Organization, in particular, the Actions 1, 2 and 3 exercise, but urged UNHCR not to allow the reform process to undermine staff motivation and well-being and to ensure that members of the Executive Committee and other UNHCR partners were involved in shaping the Office's future development.

8. In response to the High Commissioner's call for early funding commitments for 2002, he said that Finland's humanitarian aid budget for that year would probably be 15 per cent higher than in 2001, an increase which would be reflected in its contributions to UNHCR.

9. He commended the Office on its current Global Consultations process, which would work together with the parallel Tampere process of the European Union in strengthening the international protection regime. Finland also looked forward to the draft agenda for protection and the ministerial declaration to be adopted at the first ever meeting of States parties to the 1951 Convention, to be held in December 2001, and hoped that those and other initiatives, including the UNHCR 2004 project, would bring maximum benefits to refugees and other groups of concern to UNHCR during the years to come.

10. Mr. MAURER (Switzerland) said that the forthcoming ministerial meeting to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the 1951 Convention, to be held in December 2001 in Geneva, would provide an opportunity to explore ways of strengthening the application of the Convention and, in that context, he welcomed the draft text of the declaration to be adopted at that meeting. The meeting would form part of the Global Consultations process, which should be intensified with a view to achieving tangible results in strengthening the international refugee protection system.

11. Switzerland supported efforts by the High Commissioner to reform and strengthen UNHCR and to find durable solutions to the problems of refugees. He hoped that the transparency which had characterized that work, in particular Actions 1 and 2, would also obtain in the UNHCR 2004 process. Switzerland's support for UNHCR at the political, operational and financial levels was reflected in its planned contribution of 23.5 million Swiss francs, subject to parliamentary approval.

12. Turning to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the region, he stressed the need, on the one hand, to respect international humanitarian law and, on the other, to ensure that impartial humanitarian staff were not impeded in their functions, threatened or imprisoned. It was also important that the neighbouring countries should be supported in their efforts to host the Afghan refugees and that Afghanistan's international borders should not be closed.

13. Mr. NEGROTTO CAMBIASO (Italy) said that Italy fully supported the High Commissioner's approach to the restructuring of the Office but stressed that the distinction between essential and non-essential activities should not replicate the past distinction between general and special programmes and that the reduction of activities for budgetary reasons should not prejudice the protection of refugee women and children.

14. Italy also supported the Global Consultations process and welcomed the recent approval of the draft ministerial declaration for the meeting of States parties to the Convention in December 2001. Its support for the Actions 1, 2 and 3 process was manifested in an increase in its funding to the Office, from 7.6 million euros in 1999 to 12.2 million euros in 2001, with an additional contribution of 7.6 million euros for Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Given the importance of early warning in meeting the growing needs of refugees, the High Commissioner's UNHCR 2004 initiative merited particular attention.

15. Mr. MOHAMED (Nigeria) commended the High Commissioner on his reform initiative, in particular, the Actions 1, 2 and 3 to redefine the Office's core activities, but cautioned that the resulting cut-backs, such as those already effected under Action 2, might have long-term adverse consequences on protection efforts and, therefore, on the core activities. Care should also be taken in reducing non-core activities that had long-term benefits for refugees and helped cushion the burden borne by host countries. While welcoming the reform measures, in particular the granting of greater autonomy to regional directors, Nigeria stressed that the reform effort should be pursued in a fully transparent manner, taking due account of realities in the field.

16. Nigeria was pleased that host countries were now recognized as donors and appealed for practical mechanisms to help share the burden borne by such countries. Noting the problems caused to host countries by the cessation of material assistance for non-self-reliant refugees, he urged UNHCR to review refugee situations very carefully before deciding to apply cessation clauses. Nigeria supported proposals by the High Commissioner to accelerate the funding process, in particular, for contributions to be made early in the year, for the High Commissioner to have flexibility in the use of funds and for additional funds to be sourced through partnerships with other agencies, States and non-governmental organizations.

17. Finally, Nigeria supported the High Commissioner's commitment to tackling the disturbing problem of staff security and joined other delegations in condemning the terrorist attacks against the United States, calling for a united effort to avert the pending humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan.

18. Ms. APORU (Uganda) said that the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees was hardly cause for celebration given the unprecedented number of refugee situations, with Afghanistan only the latest. The international community must make a concerted effort to address that challenge. She took note of the Actions 1, 2 and 3 review process initiated by the High Commissioner to redefine the core mandate of UNHCR and ensure adequate funding, a matter of particular concern that had adversely affected programmes in Africa.

19. Uganda had a liberal asylum policy, and currently hosted around 180,000 refugees, mostly from the Sudan. Refugees were placed in settlements, rather than camps, and were given

land with the aim of making them self-sufficient. In collaboration with UNHCR her Government had adopted a self-reliance strategy with the integration of refugee services into government social policy, so that refugees had access to the same services and resources as Ugandan nationals. She noted with concern that the categorization of local integration as a core function under Action 1 involved agreement by governments to assimilation, in which case UNHCR financial support would be permitted only for 18 months. Assimilation meant that refugees acquired citizenship and had the option of remaining in the country of asylum. That issue was, however, for countries of asylum to deal with.

20. Her Government's integration and self-reliance strategy had been premised on giving refugees access to arable land. Local populations had been persuaded to make land available on the understanding that services beneficial to both refugees and nationals would be provided, and in the past UNHCR had helped in the development of infrastructure outside refugee settlements. It seemed that under Action 1 such projects would no longer be funded, which would undermine the goodwill built up among local communities. It was not possible to extend effective protection to refugees if they were better off than the local population. Unless UNHCR showed flexibility, her Government might rethink its policy and opt for camps rather than settlements.

21. It was also proposed under Actions 1 and 2 that donor countries should make money available directly to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in refugee work. That was likely to be disadvantageous to local NGOs, since donor countries tended to fund their own organizations. In addition, the proposal that other services should be incorporated in donor programmes would mean that refugees would be factored into country programmes, so that nationals and refugees would vie for the same funds, in which case there was no guarantee that refugees would remain on the agenda of development partners.

22. Regarding the proposal that each donor country should contribute at least US$ 1 or € 1 per inhabitant, she noted that her Government's expenditure on refugees represented a much larger contribution. Her Government would fully support the UNHCR 2004 process and the Global Consultations on International Protection. The declaration to be adopted at the December 2001 Ministerial Meeting should be a consensus document.

23. Mr. JOHANSEN (Norway) said that his Government would continue to be a main contributor to UNHCR, reflecting its confidence in the organization and support of its mission. Its contribution to UNHCR for 2001 would be of the order of US$ 35 million. His delegation regretted that the budget of UNHCR was an inadequate demonstration of international solidarity with the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as with the developing countries that bore a heavy burden by receiving many refugees from neighbouring countries. More determined action was called for. UNHCR should continue to focus on protection and durable solutions, strive for acceptable budgetary solutions, and promote coordination of its efforts with those of other humanitarian agencies and organizations. Donors must improve UNHCR's finances, which were too dependent on contributions from too few donors. An increase in funding from the United Nations regular budget was also justified.

24. The increasing complexity of international migratory flows presented a challenge to the international protection regime. The Global Consultations process would allow proposals for improvements to be made. UNHCR must incorporate in all its activities protection for its own

staff and the more vulnerable refugees: children, the elderly and women. It was important for UNHCR to engage in inter-agency cooperation and collaborative arrangements with NGOs in devising durable solutions. The distinction between core and non-core activities made sense only as a guideline for an institutional division of labour. The root causes of displacement must be addressed: the prospect of economic and social progress would act as a pull factor in attracting displaced persons back to their homes.

25. Mr. DEMBRI (Algeria) said that the question of refugees had become ever more complex and was now a global concern. Solidarity and responsibility were required to confront international terrorism, as represented by the tragic events of 11 September. Care must be taken to avoid racism, xenophobia and intolerance, which could only lead to confrontation and to more refugee flows. The international community must focus on the negative aspects of globalization so that all of humanity enjoyed shared prosperity, hopes and happiness.

26. Humanitarian work, essential to millions of refugees throughout the world, had been affected by a serious, ongoing financial crisis and by the heavy burden placed on host countries, particularly developing countries. Measures to promote international protection, durable solutions, development and respect for refugees must be taken in the context of a strategic partnership between donor and host countries. Most refugees were in countries in the southern hemisphere and those countries made a fundamental contribution to the protection of refugees. African States had played an important role in that regard despite their meagre resources, and the efforts of the Organization of African Unity and individual African countries must be recognized. New thinking, more resources and more effective logistics would all improve the situation of refugees.

27. The Actions 1, 2 and 3 programme must take into account the number of refugees in a given region and country, the length of the crisis and the resultant degree of instability in determining priorities for intervention, subject to objective criteria. The UNHCR 2004 and Global Consultations process represented a significant advance in the work of the organization. Revitalization of the system of international protection must include eradication of the causes of refugee flows, respect for the sovereignty of States, recognition of the contribution of host countries, burden sharing, strengthening of national capacities, adoption of regional approaches, and a change in the perception of refugees. In that regard he called for support for the plan of action for refugees in Africa.

28. Mr. PETIT (France) expressed condolences to the people of the United States of America. The terrorist attacks were a threat to all, and all countries, all cultures and all religions must take up the struggle against the criminal groups and individuals responsible for such acts.

29. The refocusing of UNHCR on its core mandate and the review of priorities were very positive. The shortage of funding made it essential for the organization to concentrate on its role of protecting refugees, and his delegation supported the criteria for intervention established by the High Commissioner. The division of labour among the various humanitarian actors must be transparent and accord with their respective mandates. It was clear that refugee movements represented a particular burden for developing countries, a factor that should be reflected in development aid. In that connection his Government was engaged in a dialogue with UNHCR regarding support for development projects that would promote the reintegration of refugees in

their home countries. The member States of the European Union sought a closer partnership with UNHCR by placing the Organization's funding on a more stable basis and involving it in the formulation of a common European Union policy on asylum.

30. His delegation welcomed the efforts by UNHCR to improve its response capacity. He commended the Organization on its intervention in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and on its preparations for the Afghan situation in an effort to avoid a further humanitarian crisis. Conflict prevention and the search for regional solutions must precede UNHCR intervention. Crises such as that in Guinea required dialogue between countries in the region. Lastly, he noted that his Government's contribution to UNHCR had increased by some 15 per cent in 2001.

31. Ms. de HOZ (Argentina) expressed solidarity with the people and Government of the United States in connection with the tragic events of 11 September.

32. Her delegation agreed with the High Commissioner that UNHCR must seek not only to protect refugees but also to find solutions, without which there could be no protection. Durable solutions to humanitarian crises must be sought from the very outset. It was often the case that massive refugee flows continued for long periods because the fundamental cause remained. Host countries were not always able to provide refugees with suitable living conditions or bring about their integration without support from the international community.

33. She reaffirmed her Government's commitment to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol and welcomed the Ministerial Meeting of States parties to be held in December 2001. She shared the High Commissioner's concern at hostility towards and mistrust of refugees and at their vulnerability. Xenophobia must be countered. Her country had a long tradition of welcoming refugees. The Government was developing special programmes in order to avert any occurrence of racial discrimination and xenophobia vis-à-vis migrants and refugees. She welcomed UNHCR's cooperation with the office responsible for determining eligibility for refugee status; that would undoubtedly benefit bona fide applicants. International developments necessitated a renewed focus on humanitarian assistance and international cooperation. In that regard she commended UNHCR on its rapid response to humanitarian crises, such as that in Afghanistan.

34. Mr. SUNGAR (Turkey) expressed his delegation's sorrow and sympathy for the victims of the terrorist attacks of 11 September. Those events had triggered new population movements and displacement and the world's attention had once again been drawn to the plight of refugees, particularly those in South-West Asia. He hoped that the international community would respond in a spirit of shared responsibility and he commended the recent efforts of UNHCR, inter alia, to mobilize the international community.

35. The aim of the Global Consultations process was to reaffirm the centrality of the 1951 Convention, while developing approaches, tools and standards to address areas that were not adequately covered by the current protection regime. Situated as it was in the centre of several population movements from east to west, Turkey was perhaps in the best position to understand the nature of such movements. From the start of the Global Consultations process, it had tried to

draw attention to the fact that conditions had changed since the drafting of the 1951 Convention. It was important to eliminate confusion regarding the implementation of asylum procedures, which threatened the integrity of the entire asylum system.

36. Turkey had been concerned to address the issue of exclusion and the problem of ensuring that refugee status was granted only to those who deserved it. It was well known that certain people tried to avoid prosecution by taking advantage of some of the vaguer provisions of asylum regulations. His delegation considered that recent developments had borne those concerns out and it was incumbent on the international community to demonstrate more sensitivity to the abuses of international protection by criminals and terrorists, without undermining the rights of refugees.

37. Ms. KUNADI (India) said the High Commissioner had been right to describe durable solutions as the heart of UNHCR's action, along with international protection. As the Secretariat had repeatedly noted, the quality of asylum had deteriorated in recent years, yet many of the States with the most limited resources had continued to host large refugee populations. In the meantime, the restrictive practices against refugees imposed by countries with both a duty and the economic means to provide protection had a detrimental impact on public opinion regarding refugee protection in the rest of the world. Neither that duty nor the real costs were fairly apportioned across the world. Burden-sharing and solidarity went beyond the mere provision of resources. An international system that failed to address such concerns was not sustainable.

38. A rigid, legalistic approach to international protection was not desirable. What was important was practice. India, for example, had not signed the 1951 Convention because the Convention failed to address a number of key issues currently being discussed in the third track of the Global Consultations; yet it hosted large numbers of refugees and funded its refugee programmes entirely from its own resources. India had long called for concerted efforts to combat terrorism. The events of 11 September had brought that need into sharp focus, yet the fight was not against a particular people or religion. It should not dilute the institution of asylum, but it was important to guard against abuse by States that, unwittingly or otherwise, sheltered terrorists.

39. The role of poverty in generating refugee crises had not been sufficiently recognized. Poverty and degradation brought out the worst in human beings, yet the resulting conflicts took forms that made it difficult to see the connection. She welcomed the High Commissioner's emphasis on bridging the gap between emergency relief and long-term development: it was essential to enhance developing countries' capacity to take back their citizens. However, the most effective approach was to prevent humanitarian crises through investment in sustainable development in those countries. Promotion of lawful and mutually beneficial migration to answer manpower needs around the world could also contribute greatly to reducing the smuggling and illegal migration associated with complex flows.

40. Her delegation considered that voluntary repatriation remained the best solution. Resettlement was also a possibility, but the implications of local integration, particularly in situations of mass exodus into a developing country, needed careful consideration. Restrictive and discriminatory practices such as lengthy detention needed to be addressed effectively. Respect for refugees meant respect for their human rights and their productive potential, and

acceptance of multiculturalism. She welcomed the new security training courses for UNHCR staff. Assistance should be given to States that requested it, to enhance their national capacity to ensure the safety of UNHCR personnel.

41. Lastly, she hoped the first two tracks of the Global Consultations process would enable States parties to strengthen their commitment to the principles of the Convention and the Protocol. India hoped that the third track would focus not so much on narrow legal approaches but on practical solutions to problems such as mass and mixed flows and the large refugee burdens faced by developing countries. What was needed above all was political commitment to the humanitarian values of asylum and protection.

42. Ms. ANDERSSON (Sweden) said the most acute task currently facing UNHCR was the situation in Afghanistan. The catastrophe that was unfolding, despite long years of humanitarian support to the people of Afghanistan and Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries, was proof of the international community's failure to deal with the root causes of conflict and forced displacement. The international community needed to give prompt support, but it must do more than meet bare minimum needs, for long-term Afghan refugees and displaced persons were finding it hard to keep hope alive. Where people remained destitute, or children did not have access to education, that could only lead to further problems.

43. Protection and assistance, on the one hand, and development, on the other, were linked. Sustainable development could not be achieved if refugees' productive capacities were ignored by host countries, returnees' own Governments, donors and aid organizations. Developing countries' ability to cope with refugee influxes could be enhanced if they provided refugees with land or employment to help them sustain themselves. What was most important, however, was to prevent forced migration. If development endeavours and efforts to prevent conflicts failed, the result would be further protracted refugee situations.

44. Sweden hoped that UNHCR's efforts to avoid financial shortfalls in the 2002 budget, by striking a balance between the minimum credible scale of UNHCR and a realistic estimate of what was fundable, would pay off. It was now up to the donors to ensure that that budget was fully funded, so that UNHCR was equipped to take on the tasks the international community requested it to perform, including ensuring the security of its own staff and humanitarian workers. Many of the recent tragic events related to refugee problems underscored the vital importance of adequate funding of UNHCR. Sweden had made a preliminary commitment to an increased contribution of 392 million Swedish kronor for 2002.

45. In the meantime, States parties to the Convention needed to give more than financial support. They should receive and protect those asylum seekers who came to their borders. UNHCR's task would be easier if more countries were prepared to assist with resettlement. In that regard, the International Conference for the Reception and Integration of Resettled Refugees, held in Sweden in April 2001, had helped to show how to facilitate the integration of people, who should be seen as resourceful individuals, and how to create a hospitable environment for them.

46. Sweden attached great importance to the absolute respect of the right to seek asylum. Crucial work was being done in establishing a common European asylum system, based on the full and inclusive application of the Convention, and 2001 had seen a breakthrough in harmonization in the European Union, in the form of agreement on an instrument to provide temporary protection for people in mass flight situations. Sweden also welcomed the recent proposal for a European Union directive on minimum standards for qualification as a refugee or a person otherwise in need of protection, which acknowledged that refugee status could be granted on the basis of persecution, whether by a State or a non-State agent. It also welcomed the proposal that persecution based on gender or sexual orientation should be included in the Convention definition.

47. Mr. NIKIFOROV (Russian Federation) said that finding solutions to refugee problems posed a challenge for the entire international community. Humanitarian efforts should go hand in hand with political initiatives. There should be a smooth transition from emergency aid to rehabilitation of refugees, for example through voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement in third countries. The issue of internal migration also needed to be squarely faced, and underlying problems should not be left to fester. Long-term solutions needed to be realistic and feasible, and should be devised with the 1951 Convention in mind. The most important element in the work of UNHCR was undoubtedly the human dimension, in other words, the fact that the plight of one State could elicit a sympathetic response from others. At the same time, international solidarity must be firmly anchored in international law.

48. His delegation welcomed the interim conclusions of the Global Consultations on the international protection of refugees, emphasizing as they did international partnership and mutual support.

49. Mr. SHA Zukang (China) said China supported UNHCR's measures to improve the organization's management and hoped the improvements to the fund-raising mechanism would help UNHCR out of its financial predicament. In view of those financial difficulties, it was realistic to make a distinction between core and non-core activities. However, his delegation considered that, when setting priorities, the particular difficulties of developing countries hosting refugees should be taken into account.

50. China had always maintained that, in order to resolve the refugee problem, it was necessary first to address its root causes, including racial discrimination, religious friction, territorial disputes, foreign interference and regional conflicts, while strengthening protection. Such root causes were as yet far from being eliminated. It would help to prevent refugee crises and, indeed, to resolve existing refugee problems, if countries would abide by the Charter of the United Nations and relevant norms of international law, including mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs and peaceful coexistence, while endeavouring to promote international peace and development.

51. China would continue to support UNHCR in its endeavours and play its part in the global efforts to resolve the refugee problem. His delegation had actively participated in the Global Consultations, which, despite controversies on many issues, he was confident would lead to a common understanding among all parties on the international protection issue and on enhancing the international protection regime.

52. Mr. YIMER (Ethiopia) said that while his delegation fully supported the High Commissioner's efforts to restructure and review UNHCR's worldwide responsibilities, economy measures should be implemented in phases without compromising vital services to refugees. Assistance to African refugees was already at a bare minimum and further reductions would adversely affect their daily lives. Furthermore, restrictive budgetary measures would inevitably affect the asylum policies of African Governments, which had very limited or absolutely no resources to cope with refugee influxes. In Ethiopia's case, it was imperative that protection should continue to be combined with assistance.

53. UNHCR needed to promote international cooperation in order to ensure equitable burden-sharing. Developing countries made enormous sacrifices to accommodate refugees. Yet international assistance to African refugees had contracted in comparison with assistance to refugees elsewhere. UNHCR should actively engage donors and mobilize international assistance to redress the balance. In addition, prolonged presence of refugees in host countries tended to place a considerable strain on the local environment and infrastructure, and UNHCR should play a role in rebuilding those assets. The Office should also be closely involved in the initial stage of reintegration following repatriation.

54. Mass influxes of refugees frequently overtaxed the local administrative apparatus in host countries. Without in any way compromising the asylum regime, UNHCR had a duty to consider States' administrative and security concerns. In conclusion, he was pleased to announce that Ethiopia had successfully completed the repatriation of various groups of refugees in its territory and had closed down a number of refugee camps.

55. Mr. VEGA (Chile) paid tribute to the work of UNHCR's staff, who daily demonstrated their dedication to the humanitarian cause of refugees around the world, sometimes at the tragic cost of their own life. Every possible effort should be made to improve security for them.

56. By coincidence, 11 September was a sad anniversary in Chile, too, as it was on that same date that violence had become an integral part of State political action, affecting thousands of innocent people, including children, and causing many Chileans to suffer exile and seek asylum. The current situation was a reminder that refugees were innocent victims and that no drop in the standards of protection should be tolerated. Chile would contribute to that effort, on the basis of its own dual experience: until 1973 as a country of asylum for those fleeing political persecution elsewhere in Latin America; and after 1973 as the country of origin of a vast number of refugees, who had received such strong international support.

57. Since its return to democracy, Chile had tried to rejoin the chain of solidarity for those seeking resettlement. The UNHCR-Chile resettlement programme constituted a modest start, but was a clear gesture of international solidarity, and a group of Afghan refugees had recently arrived in the country as part of that programme. Lastly, he was pleased to report that, under the 2000 Rio de Janeiro Declaration, Mercosur, Bolivia and Chile had reached agreement on the gradual harmonization of refugee legislation and procedures, and initial meetings had already taken place.

58. Mr. DOBÓ (Hungary) said that his Government appreciated the assistance which UNHCR had provided in developing the Hungarian asylum system, training officials, and

drafting relevant legislation. Hungarian laws relating to refugees and asylum-seekers were in full conformity with European Union legislation and relevant international standards. In the context of the Global Consultations on international protection, Hungary believed that durable solutions to refugee problems could be secured only by encouraging dialogue and cooperation between countries of origin, transit countries, and countries of asylum. Special attention should be paid to the receiving capacity of individual States. In addition, emphasis should be placed on organized crime, which was increasingly linked to illegal migration and repeated abuses of the asylum system. His Government supported UNHCR in its efforts to develop a crisis management capability, and stressed the importance of the social integration of bona fide refugees into their host countries.

59. Finally, profiting from the advice and assistance of UNHCR, Hungary had acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and had drafted new laws on aliens and Hungarian citizenship. The new legislation contained provisions expressly designed to help stateless persons obtain Hungarian citizenship.

60. Mr. FUTRAKUL (Thailand) said that the 1951 Convention was widely acknowledged as the framework within which refugees should be protected, yet it was inadequate to deal with the magnitude and complexity of contemporary refugee problems. The Convention focused on international protection at the expense of preventing and addressing the root causes of refugee problems. Moreover, in line with the principle of non-refoulement, asylum countries were under an obligation to allow all refugees and displaced persons to enter their territory notwithstanding their limited resources and underdeveloped infrastructure. The existing framework placed the primary burden of refugee problems on asylum countries.

61. His delegation hoped that the Global Consultations on international protection would address the issues of protection and solutions in a more balanced manner. After all, efforts to protect refugees were of limited use in the absence of durable solutions. UNHCR had a central role to play in helping Governments to deal with refugee situations. But UNHCR was often constrained by its mandate. More often than not, the Office was forced to concentrate on protecting refugees in receiving countries instead of tackling problems at the root. Accordingly, drastic changes in UNHCR's role might be called for. The scope of its activities could potentially be broadened and its staff numbers adjusted accordingly. Its core activities needed to be defined flexibly; they should include but not be limited to the protection of refugees. Activities such as reintegration, resettlement and repatriation should no longer be classified as non-core activities. Moreover, UNHCR should be enabled to bridge the gap between humanitarian and development assistance, with donors allocating a modest share of development assistance funding to longer-term development projects.

62. Thailand viewed repatriation as the preferred durable solution to refugee problems, since it reflected the citizen's right to return to his or her country. However, in practical terms repatriation was only an option when conditions in the country of origin allowed. Accordingly, UNHCR needed to promote capacity-building in countries of origin, for example by encouraging income-generating activities and community-based and infrastructure development projects.

63. Mr. Yimer (Ethiopia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

64. Mr. ALI (Bangladesh) said that his delegation welcomed the High Commissioner's emphasis on emergency preparedness, protection and durable solutions, and supported his review of UNHCR's mandate. A definition of core activities should not, however, result in an abrupt withdrawal from all non-core activities. The decision on what constituted core and non-core activities should be dictated by the specific circumstances of a given refugee situation.

65. The developing world had continued to bear the brunt of mass refugee influxes, in stark contrast to the "donor fatigue" of the developed countries. The High Commissioner was right to reject the distinction between humanitarian and development assistance, and Bangladesh supported his call for a contribution amounting to US$ 1 or €1 per citizen as fair and reasonable.

66. Negative stereotyping of refugees and associated xenophobia was an increasingly worrying phenomenon. The dramatization of "mixed flows" of refugees and their "mixed motives" should be vigorously combated, while at the same time efforts should be made to curb genuine abuses of the asylum system. Bangladesh itself had done its utmost to accommodate a refugee population from neighbouring Myanmar, and hoped that UNHCR would maintain its valuable support.

67. To sum up, his Government believed that voluntary repatriation was the preferred durable solution to refugee problems; that poverty and underdevelopment were the underlying causes of conflicts and should therefore be addressed; and that restrictive immigration policies merely forced refugees into the arms of traffickers and smugglers.

68. Mr. WEISS (Austria) said that the use of development funds for refugee-related projects had been discussed within the Global Consultations framework. Historically, Austrian development assistance had not explicitly included refugees, but the link between humanitarian assistance and development had become increasingly apparent. In order to create a favourable environment for socio-economic interaction with local populations, refugees needed to play a part in long-term development strategies. Accordingly, Austria fully supported the High Commissioner's vision of refugees as development actors.

69. Austria had made development funds available to UNHCR for the sustainable local integration of refugees and reintegration of returnees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Burundi. Notwithstanding the administrative difficulties of linking humanitarian assistance with development projects, his Government intended to pursue such cooperation with UNHCR whenever the Office's operations coincided with Austria's development priorities.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.

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HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Fifty-second session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 555th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 2 October 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. YIMER (Ethiopia)
(Vice-Chairman)

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STATEMENT BY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER (continued)

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In the Chairman's absence, Mr. Yimer (Ethiopia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

STATEMENT BY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. Eui-Yong CHUNG (Republic of Korea) commended the initiatives taken by the High Commissioner to strengthen the capability of UNHCR through the launching of Actions 1, 2 and 3. It was hoped that all States would respond positively and that it would then be possible to find better mechanisms to avoid the UNHCR's chronic budget shortfalls.

2. His delegation was pleased to note that UNHCR was trying to build on the accomplishments of the former High Commissioner, Ms. Ogata, in particular to enhance the organization's emergency preparedness and response capacity. In that respect, the potential refugee crisis in and around Afghanistan concerned the whole international community and his Government was currently working on UNHCR's appeal for emergency funding for a massive relief operation in the region.

3. As the High Commissioner had emphasized, the safety of humanitarian workers constituted another of the serious challenges facing the UNHCR. The tragic incidents involving UNHCR and ICRC personnel in the recent past were painful reminders of the serious security risks that such staff lived with on a daily basis. All States were called upon to take necessary measures to ensure the safety of humanitarian workers in close cooperation with the UNHCR.

4. Given the complex nature of the current refugee problem, it was timely and appropriate that the UNHCR had launched the Global Consultations on International Protection. Of particular interest to his delegation were complementary forms of protection. In some areas of the globe there were people who lived in refugee-like situations outside their countries of origin, but were not formally recognized as refugees. The international community should put more emphasis on the protection of those people on humanitarian grounds.

5. Since joining the United Nations in 1991, the Republic of Korea had been a consistent supporter of humanitarian assistance and protection programmes based on the principle of international solidarity and burden-sharing. It was clear that the UNHCR could not face the numerous challenges arising from refugee situations on its own. The effective performance of its functions could only be achieved through well-coordinated cooperation with States, international agencies and NGOs. The Republic of Korea would continue to support and cooperate with the UNHCR in its efforts to strengthen international cooperation.

6. Mr. RAMEL (Philippines) noted that the challenges that the UNHCR continued to face included emergency preparedness and response capacity, security of humanitarian workers, management of complex population flows and peace-building and coexistence between refugees and local populations. His delegation welcomed the initiatives taken by the High Commissioner to make UNHCR's activities more efficient and would appreciate ongoing consultations and updates on the results achieved.

7. Under Action 1 on the definition of core and non-core functions of the Office, his delegation would like to see flexibility, taking into consideration the needs of refugees and other persons of concern in the different regions. UNHCR also had an important role to play with respect to internally displaced persons, who constituted about a third of the people in need of protection. Under Action 2, his delegation wished to stress the importance of transparency, fairness and consultations in the reduction of staff and operations. Lastly, under Action 3, his delegation supported the call for more predictable, adequate and timely contributions from the donor community to avoid the chronic budget shortfall and underfunding that negatively impacted on the work of the Office.

8. The Global Consultations had proved successful in reviewing the refugee instruments as the bedrock of the international protection regime and fostering dialogue among States and NGOs. A theme echoed at the Consultations was the building and strengthening of protection capacities. Along that line, regional processes helped to strengthen national and regional protection capacities. They also helped to better integrate regional cooperative mechanisms. In the Philippines' own region, it was worth noting that the sixth plenary meeting of Intergovernmental Asia-Pacific Consultations on Refugees, Displaced Persons and Migrants, grouping countries of origin, transit and of destination, would be held in Manila in November 2001.

9. Lastly, the Philippines, a signatory party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, supported the adoption of a declaration at the ministerial meeting in December, marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Convention. In the follow-up action from the Global Consultations and the ministerial meeting, the search for durable solutions, including voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement, should be considered as possible elements for inclusion in an agenda of activities. As the High Commissioner had mentioned earlier, the protection of refugees was of limited value if durable solutions were not found.

10. Monsignor MARTIN (Holy See) recalled that, at the time of its publication, the 1951 United Nations Convention had undoubtedly been an innovative and courageous document. It was important to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary in that same spirit, since it would be sad to witness a subtle move towards a narrower and more restrictive interpretation of the Convention, leading to an erosion of the international protection system. The concept of asylum in fact constituted a major acquisition of modern international legal culture.

11. The increase of internal conflicts in the modern world had produced growing numbers of internally displaced persons. Unfortunately, the lack of a truly effective international protection system for those people was becoming more and more evident.

12. The full application of the Convention would require a larger and more predictable financial resource base for the Office of the High Commissioner. His delegation appreciated the efforts being made by the High Commissioner to ensure the most effective use of funds, but thought there was a limit to what could be achieved through efficiency measures. Going beyond that limit would mean wounding the very effectiveness of the Organization and its capacity to carry out its mission.

13. The adequate application of the Convention would also require a more just concept of burden-sharing. A disproportionally high burden for the international protection of refugees fell on poorer countries that very often played host to millions of persons displaced by conflict or insecurity. In other parts of the world, by contrast, new restrictions were making it even more difficult for people even to have recourse to the legal framework of protection based on the Convention. Those difficulties meant that at times people were being forced into the hands of unscrupulous networks of smugglers and had to have recourse to means outside the law.

14. The delegation of the Holy See wished to recall particularly the conclusions of the recent World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, to the effect that racial discrimination was one of the factors that contributed to forced displacement. The Programme of Action at the Durban Conference addressed those special forms of intolerance which refugees faced as they endeavoured to settle in their host countries. In that respect, the Durban Conference had produced a strong reaffirmation of the commitment of States to respect and implement humanitarian obligations relating to the protection of refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees and internally displaced persons, but it had also stressed the fundamental concept that all people and individuals constituted one human family, within which there could be no place for theories of racial superiority.

15. Mr. DUQUE (Brazil) said that, along with human rights and international humanitarian law, refugee law constituted a fundamental pillar of the international regime for the protection of individuals. Unfortunately, despite all the efforts made by the UNHCR, which had been rewarded on two occasions by the Nobel Peace Prize, there were still reasons for concern. Protracted conflict situations in all continents prompted millions to seek safer havens.

16. Faithful to its position of recognizing the importance of ensuring respect for the 1951 United Nations Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the Brazilian Government supported the strict observance by all countries of the principles contained in such instruments, particularly the principle of non-refoulement, and it renewed its call to all countries that had not yet adhered to those instruments to do so.

17. The Brazilian Government attached great importance to the process of Global Consultations on International Protection, launched by the UNHCR. It was important that existing instruments should be reviewed in order to be updated and thus help the international community to respond to the developments which had taken place in the refugee situation over the last 50 years. New challenges had appeared, particularly related to groups of persons of special concern and to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Furthermore, public perception of the refugee problem was being affected by episodes of people trafficking as well as by the waves of migrants for economic reasons. That led to unacceptable confusion, thereby justifying the need to reinforce procedures, such as identification used to determine refugee status.

18. Brazil was a party to both the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol and had been a member of the Executive Committee since 1957. Besides hosting refugees, mainly from the African continent, Brazil had decided to be one of the new resettlement countries and had signed an agreement with the UNHCR to that effect in 1999. Resettlement would take place according

to specific projects, which would involve the High Commissioner, local governments, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders. The commitment of the Brazilian authorities was not enough, however, and, despite the current severe budgetary restrictions, the Brazilian delegation reiterated that the presence of the UNHCR in the country would provide an important contribution to the successful implementation of those projects.

19. Ms. RODRIGUES (Mozambique) said that despite the efforts that the United Nations and the international community as a whole were deploying to tackle the refugee problem, the number of refugees was continuing to grow in various parts of the world. Alongside the massive movement of refugees, there were other phenomena such as illegal migration and human trafficking. The problem of former combatants had to be addressed in a concerted manner as a serious threat to the security of the refugee population and asylum-seekers. It was the prime responsibility of States to disarm combatants and separate them from civilian populations. States could also request international community assistance for the reintegration of former combatants in civilian life.

20. Urgent strategies were needed not only to educate local people away from discriminatory attitudes towards refugees, but also to shape mechanisms and systems to ensure their protection. The magnitude of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in refugee camps was another great challenge and, in that respect, attention should be given to providing refugees with the necessary information concerning prevention.

21. Despite all those challenges, it was gratifying to note that many countries continued to provide refuge to people in need. It was also encouraging to see that concerted efforts by Governments and the international community were being undertaken to address the root causes of population movements, including post-conflict confidence-building measures.

22. Her delegation was very concerned about the critical financial situation of the UNHCR. The reduction of its financial resources had severely affected the assistance provided to refugees, including the most vulnerable. Her country supported the initiatives launched by the High Commissioner aimed at re-examining the priorities of the UNHCR and finding ways of tackling them with available financial resources. Closer consultations involving host countries, donors, foreign and national NGOs and other stakeholders could contribute to the adoption of concerted and more effective measures leading to the improvement of living conditions of refugees. In that regard, her delegation welcomed the Global Consultations process and urged all States which had not yet done so to accede to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

23. The history of Mozambique in the last 40 years had been associated with the plight of refugees. In the past, many Mozambicans had found asylum in neighbouring countries and it was the turn of Mozambique, which was in a process of national reconstruction, to host an increasing number of refugees, mainly coming from the Great Lakes region. The Government of Mozambique, in close collaboration with the UNHCR, had decided to open a single refugee camp in the northern part of the country, but it needed the assistance of member States and the UNHCR to fulfil its international obligations and to create appropriate conditions in the new camp. It was therefore in favour of strengthening the capacity of the UNHCR representation in Mozambique.

24. Mr. CHIKEZ DIEMU (Democratic Republic of the Congo) thanked the United Nations for the positive role it was playing in the search for peace in the Congo. He also thanked the High Commissioner for his excellent cooperation with the country's authorities and strongly condemned the assassination of a member of UNHCR's staff and six ICRC agents.

25. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, which shared common borders with nine other African countries, had a tradition of hospitality and the refugees it took in from neighbouring countries lived in perfect harmony with local populations. Unfortunately, the Rwandan tragedy of 1994 had given rise to an unprecedented influx of refugees and three years of war, with tragic consequences: 338,450 Congolese refugees abroad, more than 2 million displaced persons, 37 per cent of the population affected by war, 47 per cent of the population with no access to drinking water, 2 million persons affected by AIDS, 2½ million civilian victims, multiple damage to the environment and the ecosystem, and the plundering of natural resources. The international community should as a matter of urgency use its moral authority to ensure that the aggressors withdrew from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, since the only suitable solution for the problems of refugees and displaced persons consisted in putting an end to war. For their part, the highest authorities in the country had launched a number of actions, both domestically and externally. They included improving the political scene and the macroeconomic framework, playing an active part in the Lusaka agreement and in dialogue within the country, the holding of five summit meetings between the Presidents of Rwanda and of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the disarming of 3,000 Rwandan combatants with a view to their repatriation. All those peace measures had run into a major obstacle in the form of the regrettable bellicose action of the occupation forces.

26. In order to enhance its support for refugees, his Government was intending to establish a real partnership with UNHCR in accordance with the Oslo Declaration, to involve NGOs more, to create awareness among public authorities and civil society in order to obtain more backing for repatriation and resettlement policies and projects in favour of displaced Congolese populations, to mobilize the assistance of development partners in favour of the resettlement of refugees and to strengthen refugee management capabilities through the Eligibility Commission.

27. There was an urgent need to give assistance to displaced persons living in his country as a result of war. The sad events of 11 September, which had been unanimously condemned, should not cause Africa to be forgotten. As far as his own country, more specifically, was concerned, peace was the only lasting solution to the humanitarian tragedy that was unfolding there. It was the duty of the international community to ensure that its commitments were successfully completed.

28. Mr. SEIF KHATIB (United Republic of Tanzania) joined other delegations in expressing his sympathy to the Government and the peoples of the United States and in condemning the terrorist acts perpetrated in September. He also deplored and condemned the murder of humanitarian staff and said that the international community should spare no effort to ensure their safety.

29. The refugee problem - bringing human tragedies, economic hardships and backwardness in its wake - seemed to have no end. It was a threat to host Governments. Tanzania was currently hosting close to 1 million registered refugees, about half of whom received assistance from UNHCR. Those refugees were a product of hostilities taking place in their respective countries of origin. The generosity of host countries alone was not a panacea for the refugee problem. An effort had to be made to eliminate the underlying causes of international conflicts.

30. His delegation associated itself with the observations made by the High Commissioner in his opening statement regarding the "mixed flows" of refugees and migrants. A special mechanism should be put in place to deal with the problem. Recently Tanzania had been facing an increase in economic and illegal migration and a corresponding abuse of the asylum procedures. The Government had no choice but to deal with the problem taking due account of national security requirements. The penetration of combatants among refugee populations was an increasingly disturbing issue. While it was primarily the responsibility of Governments to disarm and separate the combatants, UNHCR also had an obligation to act as a facilitator in ensuring that the separated combatants received care and maintenance assistance. The Tanzanian Government called on the international community to broaden its support in that regard. Tanzania continued to support all efforts in the direction of addressing the root cause of refugee crises. Several recent initiatives based on dialogue and reconciliation should help resolve the refugee problem. Recently, the Governments of Burundi and Tanzania and UNHCR had signed a tripartite agreement for the voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees from Tanzania. The repatriation operation was to start as soon as possible and Tanzania therefore called for the support of the international community towards that end. Hosting refugees had always been an expensive task. Current conflicts in the world should not provide an excuse for shifting the burden of refugee assistance on to Africa, at the risk of increasing insecurity in host countries and unrest in refugee camps.

31. Ms. ABOULNAGA (Observer for Egypt) expressed her sympathy to the Government and people of the United States, as well as to all the Governments whose nationals had been the victims of the terrorist attacks perpetrated in September. She welcomed the High Commissioner's account of the year's achievements, of the challenges ahead and of the resources available to meet them. In such difficult times, special attention had to be given to the international protection of refugees and the Global Consultations process. Egypt for its part had made an active and constructive contribution.

32. Another of the questions raised by the High Commissioner which deserved close attention was that of financing. The principle of protection would remain a dead letter so long as the UNHCR was unable to overcome the current financial crisis and so long as the burden-sharing for hosting refugees remained in the realm of theory and discussion. The matter had recently been raised on several occasions, particularly at the regional meeting held in Egypt in July. Egypt called for the implementation of the paragraphs of the draft financial declaration of the ministerial meeting of States parties to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which was to be held in December 2001, where attention was drawn to the importance of providing sufficient funding to UNHCR to enable it to fulfil its obligations towards all refugees without discrimination, in order to help them cope with their daily hardships, particularly in Africa.

33. The regional office of the UNHCR in Cairo, whose work Egypt had been supporting with whatever means it had available, was being affected by UNHCR's budgetary restrictions arising from those financial difficulties.

34. She wished the High Commissioner every success in his task and reaffirmed Egypt's willingness to cooperate with the UNHCR.

35. Mr. MICHELENA (Venezuela) said that, where refugee protection was concerned, States were bound by the standards and conclusions adopted by the international community. An effort should be made to encourage dialogue between States, as well with NGOs and other experts, in order to strengthen protection mechanisms, especially in view of the new reality of massive flows of refugees. The financial difficulties facing UNHCR were a matter of concern, to the extent that they might curtail its activities, especially in terms of action programmes needed for the protection of refugees, asylum-seekers and displaced persons. Venezuela hoped that the international community would duly fulfil its obligations, through cooperation mechanisms based on the principle of responsibility and burden sharing for the hosting of refugees, especially in situations of massive influxes. It was extremely important that the international community, through the UNHCR, should provide financial assistance to host countries which did not have the economic capacity to cope with constant, massive population flows and which were in danger of developing a kind of "hosting fatigue". Durable solutions could only be found by identifying the causes underlying those situations and adopting preventive measures.

36. In recent months, the Venezuelan Government had tightened its links and cooperation with UNHCR in the search for effective solutions to the problems of refugees and displaced persons. Its new Organic Law on refugees and asylum-seekers, which had been adopted in June, reflected the spirit of solidarity and fraternity with which Venezuela would continue to support the High Commissioner's task as far as its means permitted. After the tragic events which had recently occurred, the President of the Republic had announced that Venezuela would give its full support to UNHCR to deal with the humanitarian and refugee crisis occurring on the borders of Afghanistan. Consultations were under way in that respect with the competent authorities.

37. Mr. CHIKUNI (Observer for Malawi), speaking on behalf of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), expressed his sympathy to the Government and people of the United States of America for the tragic events of 11 September.

38. The countries of the Southern Africa region had traditionally offered asylum to refugees. During the long struggle for independence, it had sheltered refugees, freedom fighters and exiles fleeing from the atrocities perpetrated by colonial regimes. Since then, the causes that forced people to flee had changed. Civilians from a broad social spectrum had become targets and had been intentionally displaced or exiled. Local communities sometimes found it difficult to understand and adjust to those changing realities. And yet, the countries of the region were committed to maintain their traditions of asylum. There were 1.3 million refugees and nearly 6 million displaced persons currently in SADC countries, representing almost 11 per cent of refugees and 16 per cent of internally displaced persons in the world. During the meeting in

Gaborone (Botswana), organized jointly by the Regional Director of UNHCR for Southern Africa and the Executive Secretary of SADC, commissioners for refugees, persons dealing with refugee matters and SADC representatives had discussed current situations and problems, the achievements of member States and the contributions they had made. Almost every country in the region was a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, to the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and to the major human rights instruments. The participants at the Gaborone meeting had welcomed the Global Consultations process and the forthcoming ministerial meeting to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. They had also welcomed the related meeting to discuss the Comprehensive Implementation Plan adopted by the Conakry meeting to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the 1969 OAU Convention. SADC intended to participate actively and constructively in that important event.

39. One of the primary challenges faced by Governments in the region was the issue of security. The main difficulty arose from the fact that combatants mingled with genuine refugees and asylum-seekers. It was a matter of urgency for the United Nations, with the support of the international community, to set up reliable and effective cooperation mechanisms and programmes that would assist member States to complete the exercise of separation, disarmament, encampment and resolution of the situation of former combatants. There was also a need to harmonize refugee status determination procedures and relevant laws, and consideration should be given to the possibility of amending national legislation and/or withdrawing reservations made at the time some of the legal instruments had been adopted. Furthermore, there was a need to establish more effective refugee management structures, to distinguish between refugee protection and migration control, and to assist internally displaced persons, who were a growing concern in the region of Southern Africa. The participants at the Gaborone meeting had recommended setting up a refugee forum, which would work closely with UNHCR under the umbrella of SADC. That recommendation would be presented to the respective ministers responsible for refugee matters in the months ahead and it was hoped that the SADC Council of Ministers would take up the matter in the short term. The purpose of the Forum would be to harmonize and/or formulate an SADC position on issues of common concern, and to exchange information and views on the ever-changing social and political dynamics that could affect refugee policy.

40. Many were the refugee hosting countries in Africa which were struggling to meet the very basic needs of their own populations. They could not do it alone, but they could, in collaboration with UNHCR, facilitate the ongoing peace processes on the continent.

41. With help, refugees could contribute to progress, could become self-sufficient and could be productive members of host societies. That would have the effect of diminishing xenophobic tendencies observed in certain instances, and would make refugees feel that they were part of their hosting communities. SADC countries were ready to play a full part in broadening support for refugees through regional and international partnerships, but they expected the international community to support their efforts by providing adequate and predictable resources to UNHCR.

42. Mr. BANGURA (Observer for Sierra Leone) said that his Government was determined to pursue the peace process initiated within the framework of the Abuja agreement reached with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), through the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). As a result, close to 20,000 former combatants had been disarmed, so that it was hoped that civil authority would soon be re-established nationwide. With that development, Government and its humanitarian partners faced the daunting challenge of coordinating the resettlement of internally displaced persons and returnees. It was in that vein that a strategy had been worked out for the voluntary repatriation of refugees only to areas of the country that had been thoroughly assessed and declared safe. That meant the absence of hostilities, ongoing disarmament, the deployment of troops of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and the Sierra Leone armed forces (SLAs), the presence of local and civil authorities and unhindered humanitarian access. The Sierra Leone Government wished to thank the various Governments and agencies which had helped it ensure the repatriation and resettlement of refugees in safety and dignity.

43. Mr. de JONGE (Council of Europe) said that the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees offered an eminent occasion for the Council of Europe to highlight its close relationship with UNHCR and their common concern to protect the rights of refugees and displaced persons. It was in that spirit that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe had recently recommended that its member States should reconsider reservations made to some of the provisions of the 1951 Convention and remain vigilant on asylum issues. For the past five years, UNHCR and the Council of Europe had been implementing a joint technical assistance programme in selected countries of south eastern and eastern Europe, on questions such as nationality, the development of national NGO legislation and the complementarity of the European Convention on Human Rights and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

44. The right to family life was one of the basic human rights secured by international legal instruments and in particular article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. That was why the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recommended the introduction of legal guarantees to safeguard the right to family reunion and the harmonization of regulations at European level. The Assembly also intended to propose urgent measures at European level to ensure that expulsion procedures were in conformity with human rights and were enforced with respect for personal safety and dignity. Finally, the Council of Europe would shortly be adopting a recommendation on subsidiary protection, based on the recognition that not every person in need of international protection fulfilled the criteria for refugee status in the meaning of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. The aim of the recommendation was to ensure that such persons were able to seek and enjoy protection and adequate treatment in host countries with full respect paid to their human rights.

45. Mr. GEDDA (Observer for Djibouti) said that the Reconciliation Conference on Somalia, organized by his country, had led to the establishment of a new Parliament and the election of a transitional president, opening the way for the repatriation of some 30,000 Somali refugees

living in Djibouti for over two decades. His Government appealed to the international community to persuade the Somaliland authorities, who were still opposed to the voluntary repatriation of their nationals. The traditionally untouchable principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of a country should be critically reconsidered, since certain principles were undeniably universal in their scope, such as democracy, respect for human rights and the obligation to assist populations in distress. Materially speaking, his Government also relied on the international community to help it meet the considerable cost of repatriating refugees and rehabilitating the regions that had hosted them. The principle of solidarity was all the more important in that the developing countries, which hosted the greatest number of refugees, did not have the necessary resources to meet the latter's needs. It was that same poverty that gave rise to the current massive migration flows, towards which the wealthy countries should show understanding and compassion.

46. Mr. MABALA (Observer for Gabon) said that his country, with a population of only 1,500,000 inhabitants, hosted almost 17,000 refugees, which added considerable pressure to existing major socio-economic problems. His Government therefore counted on the UNHCR's assistance, in the form in particular of training programmes to enable the staff of the new National Commission for Refugees to carry out its two main duties, namely to register refugees and to inform them of the rights relating to refugee status. The Commission also needed material and financial assistance to meet its protection commitments. Many refugees in urban areas did not receive food or medical aid from UNHCR partner organizations and appealed instead to the National Commission, which found it difficult to explain to its own nationals that they were not entitled to its help. That highlighted the importance of a sectoral cooperation programme to overcome that difficulty, which could otherwise jeopardize the extreme generosity of Gabon's asylum policy.

47. Mr. NKURUNZIZA (Observer for Burundi) said that inter-Burundian negotiations had led on 28 August 2000 to the signing of a peace and reconciliation agreement, which could unfortunately not be implemented owing to the lack of a ceasefire between belligerents. Some armed groups had still not approved the agreement, intensifying instead their attacks against civilian populations and targets. The international community should consider such acts of violence as a refusal to negotiate and should take appropriate measures, including sanctions. The return to peace and safety throughout the country and the implementation of the peace and reconciliation agreement would enable large numbers of Burundian refugees to return home. On 8 May 2001, anticipating that mass return, his Government had signed a tripartite agreement with the Government of Tanzania and UNHCR and set up a technical working group on repatriation. A plan had been drafted, the main components of which were the improvement of reception and transit infrastructures, the restoration of access paths, the inventory of available lands and the registration of refugees.

48. Since the beginning of the year, more than 20,000 Burundian refugees had spontaneously left Tanzania to return to the homeland. His Government would prefer such repatriation to be organized, however, rather than spontaneous, which would require an enlargement of the

UNHCR's local administrative services, in terms of both more staff and more material and financial resources. The plan to cut the UNHCR's staffing and budget in Burundi should be suspended until a round table could be held as soon as possible with the main sponsors. He hoped that the Executive Committee would hear his plea and he called on the international community to support the Burundian refugee repatriation plan financially. He expressed his gratitude to bilateral and multilateral sponsors who had pledged contributions for repatriation operations in Burundi at the special conference organized for that purpose in Paris in December 2000. The time had come to honour those pledges.

49. Mr. TROJAN (Observer for the European Commission) said that his organization was firmly committed to continue supporting UNHCR's action to protect refugees and to find durable solutions to their plight. The Commission welcomed and supported the High Commissioner's efforts to strengthen the strategic position of UNHCR, to enforce dialogue with stakeholders and to enhance financial health and stability. A number of initiatives were being taken in the Commission to facilitate programmed support for UNHCR, particularly with regard to data management about refugees, to the needs of specially vulnerable groups and, last but not least, the security of relief workers in the field.

50. The Commission's commitment to help refugees and displaced persons should be seen in the wider context of its contribution to the world's peace and stability. The Commission's approach was to go beyond humanitarian assistance with a view to encompassing a longer term development perspective. A special budget had been set aside to finance voluntary repatriation, local integration and the resettlement of refugees and displaced persons in Asia, Latin America and Africa. In response to the current crisis in Afghanistan, the European Commission had reacted quickly with a first commitment of 4 million Euro, of which 2 million had been allocated to UNHCR. In addition a request was being prepared to mobilize a further 25 million Euro, part of which would be directed towards programmes managed by UNHCR. That would bring the total European Commission aid to the victims of the Afghan crisis to 75.5 million Euro in 2001.

51. With regard to general policy, the Commission had adopted two major policy papers, one on a common asylum procedure, valid throughout the European Union, and another on the establishment of a Community immigration policy. On the legislative front, negotiations were under way on minimum standards for fair and efficient asylum procedures and on reception conditions for asylum-seekers. The aim was to guarantee a minimum level of protection in all Member States for those who were genuinely in need of international protection. From a financial point of view, a new instrument had been created in 2001 to assist countries of origin and transit in the field of asylum and migration and to enhance capacity building of host countries.

52. Mr. CASTRILLON (Observer for Ecuador) said that the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees should be an opportunity to make lasting improvements in the refugee protection regime, particularly with regard to the right of asylum and the obligation of non-refoulement, two principles which should be reconfirmed in the declaration to be adopted at the ministerial meeting planned for December 2001.

53. States, the international organizations and civil society must combine their efforts in order to ensure that the rights of refugees were respected and to find durable solutions to the refugee problem. Radical measures must also be taken to improve the security of humanitarian staff so that they could work without risking their lives.

54. His Government called on the High Commissioner to provide continued support and assistance to meet the growing needs arising in Ecuador from population displacements caused by the armed conflict in Colombia and the consequences of the "Colombia Plan".

55. Finally, Ecuador hoped that the proposal to enlarge the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme from 58 to 61 members would be adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session.

56. Mr. MONZOULE (Observer for the Central African Republic) said that the principles of international solidarity and burden-sharing with regard to refugees should apply not only in periods of crisis but at all stages, from prevention to rehabilitation. The Central African Republic was determined to respect the 1951 Convention, so long as the hospitality granted to refugees did not jeopardize its security. In view of the dangers inherent in the presence of refugees within the country, the Central African Government requested the High Commissioner to facilitate their return to their countries of origin or first asylum. As far as its own nationals who had fled to neighbouring countries were concerned, the Central African Republic requested UNHCR to identify and disarm those carrying arms, to separate out the armed refugees from civilians and to transfer those refugees 150 km away from the common frontier in the case of the military and armed refugees and 100 km away for civilians.

57. Mr. DJINNIT (Organization of African Unity) referred to the need to address the root causes of the problem of refugees in Africa generated by the unprecedented number of conflicts afflicting the continent, a problem which the 1969 OAU Convention on Specific Aspects of Refugees in Africa had already identified. As far back as 1993, the OAU had provided itself with a mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution. Since then, many other subregional organizations had followed suit in setting up similar mechanisms. Those efforts had been followed up by men and women at the grassroots level, in particular women's associations and networks. Encouraging results were emerging in the peace processes between Ethiopia and Eritrea, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in the Mano River region and to some extent in Burundi. Those achievements highlighted the need to strengthen partnerships within the international community in order to put an end to conflicts.

58. As preparations were being made to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, he reiterated OAU's continued commitment to work hand in hand with the UNHCR through the effective execution of the joint Comprehensive Implementation Plan. The OAU also hoped that the Executive Committee, in adopting the programmes of the UNHCR, would recognize the magnitude of the suffering of the refugees in Africa.

59. Lastly, the OAU unequivocally condemned the terrorist attacks recently perpetrated against the United States, which constituted a serious challenge to international peace, security and stability with far-reaching implications including potential for humanitarian crisis.

60. Mr. EL SAYED (Organization of African Unity) gave an account of the work carried out with refugees, returnees and displaced persons by the OAU Commission, on which all members States of the OAU were represented since 1997. The OAU acted in close consultation with UNHCR. In January and February 2001, a joint mission had been undertaken in Zambia. That had been followed by another mission to the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to visit the camps of refugees and displaced persons. Immediately after assuming his post, the new High Commissioner had met at OAU headquarters with African authorities dealing with matters of mutual interest relating to refugees.

61. Many States were currently tackling the root causes of the refugee problem. In some countries the implementation of agreements had created an atmosphere conducive to the promotion of voluntary repatriation and many refugees had been able to return home over the years. The Commission therefore urged the international community fully to support all negotiations leading to peace, especially in Africa.

62. There were currently four times as many displaced persons in Africa as refugees. And yet there was no humanitarian agency with an exclusive operational mandate to deal with their plight. It was therefore hoped that the matter would be seriously discussed in the course of the next Global Consultations.

63. In accordance with the programme adopted in 1996, the Commission had recently undertaken with the OAU Secretariat fact-finding missions to eight member States. Those missions had led to recommendations, drawing attention in particular to the need for member States to implement provisions that protected the rights of refugees, but also those that defined the refugees' obligations, ensuring that they did not become involved in subversive activities or rebellious movements in the host countries. The member States had also been called upon to reflect in depth on ways of improving the security not only of refugees but also of humanitarian workers, in view of the challenges arising from the presence of armed persons in refugee camps.

64. If Africa was ever to overcome the refugee problem on the continent, a partnership must be formed with the international community as a whole, based on the principles of international solidarity, cooperation and commitment.

65. Mr. RUSSEL (International Council of Voluntary Agencies), expressing the concern of NGOs at the unfolding crisis in Afghanistan, urged neighbouring countries to respect the cardinal principle of non-refoulement and to open their borders to refugees in search of protection. The international community was strongly urged, however, to provide support to those countries so as to enable them to ensure the security of refugees in a conformity with the recent conclusions of the Global Consultations. In view of the danger of a mass exodus from Afghanistan, a humanitarian evacuation programme might become necessary. If so, lessons should be learned from the Kosovo experience and steps should be taken to strengthen regional coordination arrangements.

66. The NGOs noted with considerable concern that as a result of the recent attacks in the United States, several Governments were tightening, or had proposed to tighten, immigration controls, especially by extending the scope of provisions governing the detention of asylum-seekers. It was particularly unacceptable that several Governments had made statements that linked asylum and terrorism, since such statements were xenophobic and harmful to the right to seek asylum enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

67. The situation in Afghanistan should not detract from efforts to find solutions to other continuing crises, such as in Angola and in Sierra Leone, to take only two examples.

68. NGOs had welcomed the debate during the Global Consultations on improving implementation of the Refugee Convention and/or Protocol and were committed to developing and participating in the follow-up Agenda for Protection. They urged those States that had not yet done so to accede to the Refugee Convention, without reservations.

69. The NGOs had noted with satisfaction the determination of the High Commissioner in Actions 1, 2 and 3 to focus on the core protection mandate of UNHCR. Lastly, they called upon UNHCR and other United Nations agencies to fully participate in the newly created Internal Displacement Unit within the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Fifty-second session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 556th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 3 October 2001, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. MOLANDER (Sweden)

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GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. GANTCHEV (Observer for Bulgaria) said that the international community had been confronted with new challenges after the terrorist attacks of 11 September against the United States of America, which made the role of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) all the more important. He looked forward to the Ministerial Meeting to be held in December 2001 and the adoption of guidelines that would shape the agenda for protection in the years ahead.

2. In the context of Bulgaria's accession to the European Union, the Government was amending its legislation on refugees to bring it into line with the 1951 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees and European Union legislation on asylum. It had become obvious that there was a need for refugee registration and integration centres in the country, and for refugee housing. In that connection, the Government was transforming Bulgaria from a transit to a host country as part of its preparations for joining the European asylum system and assuming responsibilities as an external border of the European Union. The Government had also taken part in regional exercises with a refugee component so as to improve preparedness for crisis situations. In addition the Government cooperated closely with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on behalf of refugees.

3. Mr. MWANFULI (Observer for Zambia) said that Zambia, which was adjacent to two major conflict areas, was currently hosting some 250,000 refugees. Strengthening the response capacity of UNHCR was important in view of the inability of less developed countries to respond to emergencies. His Government also attached importance to the security of humanitarian staff, which required greater cooperation between host countries and UNHCR. Repatriation was the best durable solution to refugee situations. In order to make it viable, the international community must provide support for peace initiatives in countries of origin. His Government had difficulty in accepting local integration as a durable solution, and as far as resettlement was concerned, resettlement countries should consider broadening the criteria for acceptance.

4. While his Government was committed to maintaining an open-door policy towards asylum seekers, without international assistance the country's stability would be endangered. He appealed for improved funding for UNHCR programmes, which should be targeted at both refugees and host communities. Donors should also support other agencies that worked with UNHCR. Lastly, there should be more recognition of the contributions in kind made by less developed countries that hosted refugee populations.

5. Mr. BRENNAN (South Africa) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement by Malawi on behalf of the Southern African Development Community.

6. His delegation commended the High Commissioner's emphasis on the need for durable solutions and his focus on the complex challenge presented by flows of refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants. Nevertheless, his Government would welcome a greater emphasis on prevention and on addressing the root causes of displacement, including the promotion and

protection of human rights and good governance in countries of origin. In that regard he urged UNHCR to contribute to the new African initiative launched by the Organization of African Unity. The focus on core activities should be tempered by consideration for the divergent realities in displacement situations worldwide. Protection and assistance activities on the African continent were shamefully under-resourced, so that the austerity measures implemented under Actions 1 and 2 had been particularly painful. In that connection he trusted that there would be a positive impact on geographical distribution in terms of staffing particularly at senior levels.

7. He welcomed the positioning of displacement situations in a sustainable development paradigm and the appeal to donors to consider development-oriented funding arrangements. His delegation shared the concern for staff security and welcomed the steps taken. Similarly, the improvements in emergency preparedness and response capacity were to be commended. He noted the increasingly important role of civil society in humanitarian endeavours, including the protection of asylum seekers and refugees. Lastly, he welcomed the assistance provided to his Government by UNHCR in dealing with the backlog of refugee status determination cases.

8. Ms. KASINGO (Namibia) said that her delegation welcomed the focus on the dignity of refugees, but noted that not all countries were in a position to provide for them adequately. Her Government was concerned at the lack of resources available to it to cope with the country's refugee population, which stood at over 20,000. Water supplies were under increasing strain in refugee areas. Efforts were under way to identify new locations for refugees in Namibia so as to allow them to engage in agriculture. The Government also provided school facilities for children and study programmes for adults. Nevertheless, more resources were needed. It was, of course, difficult to predict refugee flows, but it seemed certain that the continued terrorizing of the population in Angola by UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola) would lead to an increase in refugee numbers. UNHCR should play a more active role in tackling such root causes by participating in conflict resolution. The presence of soldiers among civilian refugees represented a serious security threat to her Government, and she appealed for UNHCR's assistance in dealing with soldiers separately.

9. She associated her delegation with the statement by the Southern African Development Community. The presence of internally displaced persons hampered socio-economic development, and merited close scrutiny and additional resources. She agreed with the High Commissioner that the gap between emergency relief and long-term development must be closed. Namibia acted within the framework of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, and the Organization of African Unity Refugee Convention of 1969. It would make every effort to accede to all other relevant international instruments.

10. Ms. ZEMICHAEL (Observer for Eritrea) expressed her delegation's dismay at the terrorist events of 11 September.

11. The voluntary return of Eritrean refugees who had fled to the Sudan during the war had resumed. Some 20,000 refugees had returned so far in 2001, and an additional 140,000 were expected to follow by the end of 2002. The reintegration of those refugees would require an extended development programme. She welcomed the review of UNHCR's core activities,

operations, structures and fund-raising strategies. However, budgetary reductions must not compromise the services that UNHCR was mandated to deliver. The linkage between refugees and internally displaced persons must also receive due consideration.

12. Her Government was engaged in national reconstruction and the reintegration of internally displaced persons, returnees and demobilized combatants. Those programmes formed part of a comprehensive national reconstruction and development strategy. There was a fully functional coordination mechanism between the various humanitarian and developmental actors engaged in Eritrea, which had been instrumental in the effective utilization of resources. Durable solutions were attainable provided that refugees were given assistance in regaining livelihoods.

13. Ms. ANDJELIC (Observer for Bosnia and Herzegovina) said that there had been good progress in returns to Bosnia and Herzegovina by members of minorities, with some 150,000 registered since 1999. It was significant that returns were occurring in localities that had been "no go" areas a few years previously. Real progress had also been made in connection with property laws and claims for property restitution; some 30 per cent of the approximately 250,000 outstanding claims had resulted in repossession. The Government was committed to bringing that issue to a successful conclusion.

14. She noted with concern that the budget of UNHCR had declined, since its presence was required in her country for at least the next two to three years. While there had been some progress in the return of refugees from and to Croatia and from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the numbers were disappointing. A new problem was the increasing number of illegal migrants and an increase in asylum seekers. The Government was seeking to establish a properly functioning asylum system in the context of its Stability Pact. Unfortunately, the reconstruction of destroyed housing was lagging behind the numbers of returning refugees. UNHCR itself estimated that some 22,000 houses were needed for those who had returned or were returning. She appealed to the international community for additional funds for that purpose. That would make a real contribution to stability.

15. Mr. HARELIMANA (Observer for Rwanda) said that his delegation condemned the terrorist attacks in the United States of America.

16. The funds available for refugee activities in Rwanda following the genocide remained inadequate in comparison with the country's needs. UNHCR should continue its efforts to mobilize funds for assistance to refugees and the reintegration of returnees. The gap between emergency and development activities must be bridged in the interest of coexistence. Refugee movements affecting Rwanda continued at a rate of 25,000 to 30,000 annually. He called on the international community to maintain its support for socio-economic reintegration programmes. In that connection he trusted that UNHCR would assist in the repatriation of unaccompanied Rwandan children. At present there were some 35,000 Congolese and Burundian refugees in Rwanda in need of assistance from UNHCR pending their repatriation. UNHCR assistance would also be required should they ultimately be settled in Rwanda or in third countries. In that regard the Government reaffirmed its support for the principle of voluntary repatriation.

17. The presence of refugees was causing serious environmental problems. UNHCR should provide assistance in the form of programmes for reforestation and provision of other energy sources to replace the use of firewood. He was pleased to report that his Government had recently consolidated its national legislation on the protection of refugees. All States must engage in conflict prevention, promote human rights and improve living conditions so as to prevent new refugee flows.

18. Mr. PETÖCZ (Observer for Slovakia) said his delegation shared the High Commissioner's view that funding to UNHCR should be commensurate with its global importance as a multilateral organization. Slovakia had been able to contribute to the programme budget for the first time in 2001 and hoped to be able to continue to do so. His delegation also welcomed the steps being taken to enable the organization to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century and in particular the recent changes in its Bratislava Office and the UNHCR 2004 process as a whole.

19. Increased efforts would be needed to deal with the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan in the wake of the events of 11 September in the United States and every assistance should be given to the neighbouring countries, which would bear the brunt of refugee flows. Slovakia was prepared, if so requested by UNHCR, to consider providing temporary protection to Afghan refugees, in line with current national legislation.

20. The number of asylum seekers in Slovakia, as in other countries in the region, was constantly growing. Between January and August 2001 there had been a 257 per cent increase over the previous year. Even so, it remained primarily a country of transit for those seeking better economic opportunities in the European Union. As a candidate for European Union membership, Slovakia was currently making efforts to bring its asylum legislation into line with that of European Union countries and was therefore greatly interested in the European Union's own harmonization process. His delegation was pleased with the Global Consultations process and appreciated in particular the discussions on the asylum-migration nexus and complementary forms of protection launched by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). He was convinced that the outcome of the debate would be practical steps to benefit refugees and a framework for durable solutions to the refugee problem.

21. U SAW TUN (Observer for Myanmar) said that a basic problem in international refugee crises was the varying policies of host States and the lack of institutional regulation of agencies' response. Irregular and illegal migrants should not all be termed refugees and not all refugees should be given asylum. Some so-called refugees were exiles, fugitives, insurgents, terrorists and economic refugees. Myanmar respected the principle of non-refoulement. It also supported asylum for illegal and irregular migrants on humanitarian grounds and international protection for the poor and the vulnerable, but not for destructive elements. Asylum should not be granted to those who abused the system. However, it was often very difficult to distinguish them from genuine refugees and Myanmar therefore believed in stricter immigration policies.

22. As long as there was a demand for foreign labour, there would also be illegal migration and trafficking. Emigration represented a loss of human capital to the country of origin, where that capital was most needed for development. Such outflow of human capital should be prevented and it was important that neighbouring countries should not encourage the illicit

employment of migrant labourers and victims of trafficking. It was natural for people to migrate from less developed areas in one country to neighbouring developed countries. The gap between rich and poor should be narrowed, but neighbouring countries should cooperate in tackling the root causes of migration by harmonizing their development. Coordination of that kind would further enhance UNHCR's achievements and the impact of its humanitarian endeavours.

23. Mr. OSUNDWA (Observer for Kenya) said the refugee problem had become a major global issue that should be addressed by all and not left only to the host countries. Kenya had over the years provided refuge for the victims of forced migration within the region, but the burden needed to be shared and adequate resources should be put at the disposal of those countries that hosted huge numbers of refugees, with all the resulting implications for their development. A number of delicate issues needed to be addressed in order to safeguard genuine refugees. Some persons were inclined to abuse the asylum system and at times there were skirmishes in the camps that aroused fear among others living there and apprehension in the local communities, who saw refugees as exporting their hostilities to the host country. Kenya had continued to try to bring together dissenting factions within the region in pursuit of peace and his delegation believed that the refugee problem involved issues not only of immediate protection but also of sustainable peace, development, stability, reconciliation and coexistence in the countries of origin.

24. There was a clear imbalance in the provision of assistance to refugee programmes. Refugees in Africa existed on the barest minimum and any cuts would seriously affect basic needs such as education and food. Kenya supported UNHCR 2004, which aimed to ensure that UNHCR was appropriately structured and positioned to carry out its role as the main international institution dealing with the refugee problem. It also welcomed the global consultations process, whose outcome, he hoped, would be a consensus document taking into consideration the various concerns expressed regarding international protection. His Government was committed to hosting genuine asylum seekers in accordance with the relevant conventions, and his delegation appealed to the international community to provide more resources to help refugees rebuild their lives and to establish lasting peace in the regions.

25. Mr. SIMONIN (Observer for the Sovereign Order of Malta) agreed with the High Commissioner that it was vital for UNHCR to be able to respond to unexpected emergencies, such as the situation that was developing in Afghanistan following the appalling terrorist attacks on the United States, which the Order of Malta most strongly condemned. Global efforts to combat terrorism must be matched by an equally global effort to avert the humanitarian consequences of such barbaric acts, not only on Afghanistan but also on its neighbours.

26. The Emergency Corps of the Order of Malta (ECOM) was already on the alert: an evaluation team was preparing to visit Iran to assess needs and coordinate actions, in order to make its contribution as effective as possible. The local integration of refugees and reintegration of displaced persons and returnees would require continuing efforts for some time, and the Order of Malta was pursuing sustainable solutions through projects such as a women's programme in Bosnia and construction projects in Kosovo and Cambodia, as well as food centres in Sudan and medical aid for refugees from Myanmar in Thailand.

27. Mr. VIERU (Observer for the Republic of Moldova) said that, in a short period, his country had made significant steps towards democracy. It was no easy task for countries in transition to a market economy to adopt human rights standards. Many regions were exposed to disturbance and disorder, setting up new migratory pressures, and the situation with regard to asylum was particularly complex. Asylum had been made a constitutional right in the Republic of Moldova, in accordance with the international instruments to which it had acceded. There was as yet, however, no mechanism to implement that right. Parliament was considering draft legislation on accession to the 1951 Convention and its Protocol, while legislation on the status of refugees had passed its first reading in May 2001 and was shortly to be presented for the second reading. Refugee problems were coordinated and monitored by the Department for Refugees, which had been established within the Ministry of Justice.

28. While his Government was committed to seeking solutions, some problems depended on others such as the continuing consequences of the Transnistrian military conflict of 1992. No solution had yet been found to the problem of internally displaced persons. Only the proper implementation of the decisions taken at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) summit in Istanbul in 1999 would substantially contribute to effective control of illegal migration in that area. In the meantime, UNHCR offered assistance in formulating strategies in accordance with the principles established in the Programme of Action of the CIS Conference and since 1998 had been preparing programmes to assist internally displaced persons. His Government was grateful to the Japanese Government for its grant to promote reconciliation, the first of its kind after the conflict.

29. UNHCR was active in promoting tolerance and democratic values in the Republic of Moldova, by maintaining contacts with civil society, organizing conferences, translating legislation and providing the Government with know-how and access to international forums. Bilateral assistance was also needed to develop the asylum system and his Government was grateful to the United States Government for its resettlement quota. UNHCR support would be even more necessary after the adoption of the national legal framework on refugee issues, for the implementation of its provisions and the establishment of a central refugee authority. His Government also requested the help of the European Commission and IOM in designing a response mechanism to clandestine migration.

30. He hoped that consultations would continue between his Government and UNHCR on material assistance to implement the Convention. Initial help would be needed with expenses such as lodging, food and medical assistance, which the Republic of Moldova could not provide from its limited budget. He requested the Executive Committee to bear his statement in mind when adopting the Annual Programme Budget.

31. Mr. SIMKHADA (Observer for Nepal) said that the majority of refugees were in developing countries, which struggled to extend them all possible humanitarian aid despite the hardships faced by their own populations. The legitimate concerns of such host countries needed to be taken into account and the international community must be more forthcoming in burden sharing.

32. Despite high economic, social and environmental costs, Nepal had hosted more than 100,000 Bhutanese refugees for more than 10 years. A bilateral dialogue with Bhutan had

been initiated in order to ensure their return. Verification had started but the process needed to be speeded up. Nepal would continue its efforts to see them returned to their country in safety and dignity and thanked UNHCR and the international community for assisting with care and maintenance and supporting efforts to find a durable solution through voluntary repatriation.

33. Mr. RADOVANOVIC (Observer for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) said Yugoslavia had more refugees than any other European country, with nearly 450,000 refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as 250,000 internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija. As a country in transition, recovering from years of war and economic decline, it faced an extremely difficult task and his Government appreciated the direct humanitarian assistance provided by UNHCR.

34. The international community needed to find a more effective way to close the gap between emergency relief and longer-term development. The Republic of Serbia, for example, which hosted the largest number of refugees, had already initiated a variety of measures within the framework of the national strategy for durable solutions. He hoped that local integration projects would be supported by international financial institutions, UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies.

35. Only 80 internally displaced persons had been repatriated to Kosovo and Metohija in the past two years. Terrorist acts and the absence of freedom of movement were obstructing the return to a decent life for all. Yugoslavia's primary concern remained the restoration of a multi-ethnic community and it was committed to cooperation with the international community.

36. Mr. HUSSAIN (Observer for Iraq) said that Iraq was continuing to coordinate and cooperate with UNHCR in order to facilitate the return of Iraqi refugees. An average of 200 were returning each month. As it had indicated on more than one occasion, his Government was also ready to cooperate with UNHCR in finding durable solutions to the problem of refugees in Iraq who wished to return home, and hoped that UNHCR would continue its humanitarian efforts among the countries concerned in order to facilitate their return. Despite the difficult economic conditions resulting from the embargo, all refugees had been provided with a ration card to enable them to obtain food and medical assistance on an equal footing with Iraqi nationals. Local authorities also allowed refugees access to the labour market and education.

37. Before the imposition of the embargo in 1990, Iraq had provided all assistance to refugees on its territory without needing the support of UNHCR, except with regard to supervision. UNHCR's budget of around US$ 3.25 million for Iraq was modest compared with what it provided for refugees elsewhere in the region, and out of that, some US$ 2.15 million went on administrative expenses for the UNHCR Office in Baghdad, while the remainder was spent on 34,000 refugees. With the ongoing embargo, the Iraqi Government had a responsibility to its own citizens and must prioritize their needs. It therefore requested UNHCR to re-evaluate its activities and particularly its budget for Iraq. It was becoming more and more difficult to provide adequate assistance to refugees and that situation would continue in the future. The time had come for UNHCR to shoulder that responsibility.

38. According to sources in UNHCR, one million Iraqis had left the country since the imposition of the embargo, mainly for economic reasons. His Government hoped they would

return to Iraq and asked the international community to lift the embargo in order to alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people, stem the flow of migrants and make it easier for those who had left to return.

39. Mr. AL-ATTAR (Observer for Yemen) said that the political crisis in the Horn of Africa had triggered an influx of refugees into Yemen. A national commission had been established to safeguard their interests. The Yemeni Government had endeavoured to tackle the root causes of the refugee problem by sponsoring political reconciliation in the region. The 1951 Convention and its Protocol should be considered the minimum standard for the protection of refugees, with further development of the protection regime required in the light of changing circumstances. For example, international humanitarian law should make provision for the protection of the Palestinian people against the occupying Israeli forces.

40. Mr. LAMB (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and its member National Societies were the largest operational partner of UNHCR. IFRC had recently launched fresh appeals for assistance to Afghan refugees and called for redoubled efforts to tackle the problems of discrimination and violence against refugees in general. Governments needed to recommit themselves to the principles enshrined in the 1951 Convention.

41. In partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross, IFRC and the Red Crescent Societies of Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan had made preparations for a mass influx of Afghan refugees to neighbouring countries. That task would be performed most effectively by agencies with an intimate understanding of the needs of the refugees themselves. IFRC would therefore conduct its operations in partnership with the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on the spot. To that end, several National Societies planning to provide humanitarian assistance had met at IFRC Headquarters in Geneva on 1 October to update each other on their proposed initiatives, consolidate their resources, and coordinate activities at regional level.

42. Mr. MOUNTAIN (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) said that a serious refugee crisis was currently developing in Afghanistan. There was also a crisis of internal displacement. Other Afghans had chosen to stay put, but lacked even the most basic necessities. The principal difficulty facing aid agencies was lack of access to needy populations within Afghanistan itself. Drought and land mines were complicating factors.

43. The unfolding crisis in Afghanistan called for a coordinated plan embracing the entire region. The cohesion of the international response would be strengthened by presenting donors with a single consolidated plan and appeal. Much of the groundwork had already been laid by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): agreement had been reached with the World Food Programme (WFP) to provide system-wide logistics and support, thereby avoiding unnecessary duplication; a regional humanitarian coordinator had been appointed; the offices of United Nations Resident Coordinators had been strengthened throughout the region; the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team had been mobilized; OCHA personnel formerly stationed in Afghanistan had been relocated to border areas with a view to re-entering the country when circumstances permitted; and a donor alert had been issued, which he hoped would be widely heeded.

44. Ms. CONTAT-HICKEL (International Committee of the Red Cross) said that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was currently assisting more than 5 million displaced people all over the world. Voluntary repatriation was widely recognized as the most desirable durable solution to refugee problems, and all humanitarian actors should cooperate in fostering favourable socio-economic conditions conducive to the safe and dignified return of refugees. States had a particular responsibility to ensure adequate funding for humanitarian and development agencies. ICRC was committed to protecting and assisting the victims of armed conflicts, but other agencies within the United Nations system, or IFRC and its member National Societies, were perhaps better qualified to satisfy the needs of other vulnerable groups such as long-term refugees and displaced persons.

45. A clear-cut division of responsibilities and tasks among humanitarian and aid agencies could only benefit refugees and internally displaced persons, and to that end ICRC had taken part in the inter-agency coordination process organized by OCHA. The same desire for enhanced coordination underlay the annual high-level meetings between ICRC and UNHCR. Nevertheless, humanitarian actors were acutely aware of the fact that they had little control over the underlying causes of conflicts. It was the task of the international community to supply political solutions.

46. Mr. KASTBERG (United Nations Children's Fund) said that children had increasingly been drawn into wars both as combatants and perpetrators of atrocities. At the same time, the protection of civilians in conflict situations, and especially the protection of women and children, had moved to the top of the political agenda. Laws and standards had been enacted to protect refugee children, but enforcement of such instruments remained the most intractable problem. Accountability did not simply mean the prosecution of war criminals; it meant a political and social climate in which violators of children's rights must be made to feel that civilized people everywhere considered their actions to be repugnant. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) pledged to work alongside UNHCR to protect civilians and especially children in armed conflicts.

47. To that end, UNICEF desired closer and earlier involvement in UNHCR plans for the local integration or repatriation of refugees. UNICEF was also prepared to support advocacy efforts designed to encourage political decision-makers to assume their responsibilities and identify solutions to refugee problems. There was scope, furthermore, for closer cooperation with UNHCR in the fields of education and the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

48. Mr. SCHATZER (International Organization for Migration) said that the recent terrorist attacks in the United States of America had simply reinforced suspicion of migrants. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) should join with UNHCR to project a more favourable image of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. It should not be forgotten that the motives and aspirations of the vast majority of migrants were perfectly legitimate. The terrorist attacks had brought the Afghan refugee crisis into sharp focus. IOM's local staff in Afghanistan were continuing to carry out essential and worthwhile projects to assist refugees. In conducting its operations, IOM had maintained close contact with its United Nations partners and intended to join the OCHA regional coordinating group based in Islamabad.

49. The High Commissioner had alluded to the challenge of managing complex migratory flows impelled by different motivations. IOM shared his analysis and agreed that the expeditious processing of asylum claims, coupled with community education efforts to dispel misconceptions about asylum-seekers and refugees, should help to improve the situation. It was also essential for the international community to identify administrative principles and practices that promoted orderly movement and deterred irregular migration. Such action could not be achieved through control measures alone. The conditions that impelled people to move also had to be addressed, for example human rights violations and underdevelopment. Campaigns should be launched to keep the general public and decision-makers better informed.

50. Mr. SOLANO (Observer for Guinea) expressed his Government's gratitude for the efforts UNHCR had made, in both the field and through diplomatic channels, to alleviate the burden imposed by the presence of thousands of refugees in Guinea for more than a decade and to mitigate the effect of armed attacks by rebels on Guinea's borders. Guinea appreciated in particular the visit to the country by the High Commissioner and welcomed the improvement in the coordination of humanitarian activities by NGOs and donor countries. Nevertheless, the management of refugee problems in Guinea was becoming increasingly difficult. During the past year attacks on residential areas had forced the Government, with UNHCR assistance, to relocate refugees to the interior of the country, where they and humanitarian relief workers would be safer.

51. There were currently some 200,000 refugees on record from Liberia and Sierra Leone in Guinea, and many more who had not been registered. As the current situation in those two neighbouring countries was conducive to the repatriation of refugees, his Government called upon the international community to launch a repatriation programme there immediately. Such an operation, which would further efforts to secure lasting peace in the subregion, would require the creation of two corridors for humanitarian assistance and the mobilization of resources for the rehabilitation of border control infrastructures, which had been totally destroyed by the rebels.

52. For more than 10 years refugees in Guinea had enjoyed freedom of movement comparable to that of Guineans. Their extended stay in the country, however, had had a profound impact on the environment and on all aspects of people's lives. Moreover, Guinea faced problems posed by the displacement of as much as 5 per cent of its own population as a result of rebel attacks. Those population flows had aggravated poverty in zones already identified as vulnerable before the crisis. The international community should therefore consider the most appropriate ways of rebuilding those areas through bilateral and multilateral programmes. To that end, the Government hoped, with the support of the international community, to hold a conference to demonstrate solidarity with Guinea. It hoped that the Executive Committee would also provide support for the holding of such a consultation, which would address the problems caused by years of refugee presence in the country. Guinea could then consolidate its stability, participate more effectively in the restoration and maintenance of peace and security in the subregion, pursue its own economic and social development, consolidate and enhance the process of democratization, good governance and the defence of human rights, and work to eliminate poverty. His Government was fully prepared to work with all international humanitarian agencies and organizations with a view to finding a lasting solution to the problems of refugees.

53. Ms. ZAFIROVSKA (Observer for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that flagrant violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms in the Balkans at the outset of the twenty-first century had led her country to host over 360,000 refugees, who accounted for 18 per cent of the total population. As a result of terrorist activities in some parts of the country, there were also large numbers of internally displaced persons. In addition, some 35,000 Macedonian citizens were currently staying in Kosovo. The UNHCR office in Skopje, in cooperation with other United Nations agencies and international organizations, had undertaken a number of activities to help those people, and she expressed appreciation for their efforts. Political measures and financial assistance were both required to solve the problems of refugees and displaced persons; her Government had adopted political measures to address those crises and hoped that UNHCR would provide further assistance in the rebuilding and reconstruction of the affected regions.

54. While experience showed that humanitarian assistance should be accompanied by confidence-building measures, diplomatic efforts aimed at conflict-prevention constituted the best means of addressing the problems of refugees and displaced persons. However, such solutions required time and sustained international commitment. Governments, UNHCR and refugees all had a common interest in ensuring an effective universal protection regime, and her country would play its part in achieving that end.

55. Ms. MINA (Observer for Cyprus) endorsed the statements made on behalf of the European Union and added that, because of its geographical position at the crossroads of three continents and its situation as a divided island, her country faced specific problems associated with displaced persons and economic migration. Those problems could be solved only with the close cooperation of all interested parties. While the problems relating to economic migrants seemed to be moving towards a solution, other problems were more complicated and involved parties other than the Government of Cyprus and UNHCR. Cyprus belonged to a region where existing conflicts perpetuated or aggravated the situation of refugees and displaced persons.

56. Ways must be found of improving the financial base of UNHCR, but the importance of political and moral support for efforts to solve humanitarian problems should also be borne in mind. Responsibility-sharing was an essential form of support for UNHCR activities, as the current humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, which also affected Afghanistan's neighbours, made clear. Her Government would continue to support the work of UNHCR and commended the staff of the Office, both at headquarters and in the field.

57. Mr. KNOTHE (Poland) endorsed the remarks by the High Commissioner on the need to reform UNHCR to meet current and future challenges. His delegation also associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union. To fulfil its mandate, UNHCR needed to be able to rely on a partnership of States. Poland had built its own system of refugee protection through the enactment of legislation and the creation of administrative bodies and the valuable experience it had accumulated had produced an effective and sophisticated system. Most recently, in April 2001, Poland had amended its Aliens Act to make it consistent with European s andards.

58. An effective national system of protection was dependent on the involvement of representatives of civil society, and particularly NGOs. Poland had recently expanded its capacity to provide legal assistance to refugees through the introduction of legal clinics at major universities in Krakow and Warsaw. Yet the Polish Refugee Board had observed that the humanitarian institution of refugees was being misused for immigration purposes, which led to an unproductive use of resources. Given that problem and others arising from new patterns of armed conflicts and the growth in trafficking in persons, his delegation strongly supported the process of global consultations.

59. Mr. WISNUMURTI (Observer for Indonesia) commended the efforts of the High Commissioner in the first year of his mandate to address the acute problems faced by refugees and by UNHCR. As a country with first-hand experience of refugee problems, Indonesia was firmly committed to cooperating closely with UNHCR.

60. With regard to East Timorese refugees in West Timor, he said that the withdrawal of UNHCR and other international humanitarian personnel in the wake of the Atambua incident had dealt a significant blow to the repatriation programme in West Timor. Nevertheless, his Government would continue it own efforts until all refugees were either voluntarily repatriated, locally integrated or relocated. The registration of refugees in June 2001, which observers had deemed fair and peaceful, would assist the speedy repatriation or resettlement of refugees on the basis of their own priorities. The Indonesian Government's policy in respect of East Timorese refugees focused on reconciliation, voluntary repatriation and resettlement. With the improvement of security conditions in East Timor, many persons had expressed a desire to return there. In order to repatriate a record number of refugees in just three to four months, multilateral cooperation was vital, so that he appealed for the return of all United Nations personnel to Indonesia, and especially to West Timor, where his Government hoped that the Organization's humanitarian operations would resume. His delegation was confident that the memorandum of understanding between the Indonesian Government and the United Nations regarding security requirements would soon be concluded.

61. The Indonesian Government had strongly condemned the senseless and brutal killing of three United Nations humanitarian workers and six Indonesians in Atambua in 1999. It should be noted that the verdict reached in May 2001 by the North Jakarta District Court was not final, and the Government of Indonesia intended to pursue the case until justice was served. It was to be hoped that the international community would perceive that move as an indication of Indonesia's determination to treat the matter with the utmost seriousness.

62. Mr. BENJELLOUN-TOUIMI (Morocco) drew attention to the report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara (S/2001/613) and said that updated information on the population of that territory was contained in annex III. It should be noted that the majority of Saharans did not live in the refugee camps at Tindouf, but lived peaceably throughout the territory. Those living in the camps were not free and were thus unable to express their will. Accordingly, his Government believed that they should be afforded international protection, and the international community should consider the possibility of their repatriation. If the settlement plan for Western Sahara was being obstructed, it was not by Morocco. Rather, the lack of progress was due to the stalling of the Frente Polisario and their supporters, as paragraphs 20 to 42 of the Secretary-General's report made clear. However, the

situation in the Sahara had entered a new phase on 29 June 2001, when the Security Council had urged both parties to give consideration to the proposed framework agreement for a settlement, which the Secretary-General had termed "the last window of opportunity for years to come". His delegation therefore hoped that UNHCR would take advantage of the new situation, which would create favourable conditions for the repatriation of Saharan refugees.

63. The international protection of refugees must be strengthened, and the global consultation process was an effective mechanism for doing so. Refugees must be viewed as more than simply mouths to feed. He urged UNHCR to develop its own reliable methodology for calculating the size of refugee populations rather than relying on figures provided by national Governments. Lastly, he urged UNHCR to bear in mind the traditional reluctance of bureaucrats to embrace change and to heed the call for innovative approaches to the problems of refugees.

64. Mr. MADI (Observer for Jordan) endorsed the statement by the High Commissioner and expressed his delegation's regret at and condemnation of the recent terrorist attacks in the United States of America. In that connection, he welcomed the appeals that had been made to refrain from attributing the attacks to a single people or religion. It was to be hoped that those events would not affect the situation of refugees.

65. His delegation believed that the security of UNHCR staff must be ensured by the host country. In that connection, he drew attention to the memorandum of understanding concluded between UNHCR and Jordan and reiterated his Government's readiness to cooperate with UNHCR within that framework.

66. Ms. PRANCHERE-TOMASSINI (Observer for Luxembourg) associated herself with the statement made by the representative of Belgium on behalf of the European Union and said that her Government had allocated 50 million Luxembourg francs (US$ 1.1 million) for assistance to the civilian population of Afghanistan in 2002 and would increase its contribution to UNHCR for the coming year by 20 per cent.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.